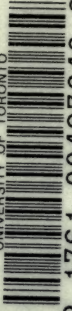


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THE WORKS
OF
MATTHEW ARNOLD
IN
FIFTEEN VOLUMES
VOLUME I

I

THE WORKS



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P O E M S

BY

MATTHEW ARNOLD

VOLUME I

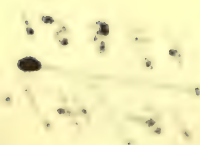
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EARLY POEMS

VOL. I

B

SONNETS

QUIET WORK

ONE lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee,
One lesson which in every wind is blown,
One lesson of two duties kept at one
Though the loud world proclaim their enmity—

Of toil unsever'd from tranquillity !
Of labour, that in lasting fruit outgrows
Far noisier schemes, accomplish'd in repose,
Too great for haste, too high for rivalry !

Yes, while on earth a thousand discords ring,
Man's fitful uproar mingling with his toil,
Still do thy sleepless ministers move on,

Their glorious tasks in silence perfecting ;
Still working, blaming still our vain turmoil,
Labourers that shall not fail, when man is gone.

EARLY POEMS

TO A FRIEND

Who prop, thou ask'st, in these bad days, my
mind?—

He much, the old man, who, clearest-soul'd of
men,

Saw The Wide Prospect, and the Asian Fen,¹
And Tmolus hill, and Smyrna bay, though blind.

Much he, whose friendship I not long since won,
That halting slave, who in Nicopolis
Taught Arrian, when Vespasian's brutal son
Clear'd Rome of what most shamed him. But
be his

My special thanks, whose even-balanced soul,
From first youth tested up to extreme old age,
Business could not make dull, nor passion wild ;

Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole ;
The mellow glory of the Attic stage,
Singer of sweet Colonus, and its child.

SONNETS

SHAKESPEARE

OTHERS abide our question. Thou art free.
We ask and ask—Thou smilest and art still,
Out-topping knowledge. For the loftiest hill,
Who to the stars uncrowns his majesty,

Planting his stedfast footsteps in the sea,
Making the heaven of heavens his dwelling-place,
Spares but the cloudy border of his base
To the foil'd searching of mortality ;

And thou, who didst the stars and sunbeams know,
Self-school'd, self-scann'd, self-honour'd, self-
secure,
Didst tread on earth unguess'd at.—Better so !

All pains the immortal spirit must endure,
All weakness which impairs, all griefs which bow,
Find their sole speech in that victorious brow.

EARLY POEMS

WRITTEN IN EMERSON'S ESSAYS

' O MONSTROUS, dead, unprofitable world,
That thou canst hear, and hearing, hold thy way !
A voice oracular hath peal'd to-day,
To-day a hero's banner is unfurl'd ;

Hast thou no lip for welcome ?'—So I said.
Man after man, the world smiled and pass'd by ;
A smile of wistful incredulity
As though one spake of life unto the dead—

Scornful, and strange, and sorrowful, and full
Of bitter knowledge. Yet the will is free ;
Strong is the soul, and wise, and beautiful ;

The seeds of godlike power are in us still ;
Gods are we, bards, saints, heroes, if we will !—
Dumb judges, answer, truth or mockery ?

SONNETS

WRITTEN IN BUTLER'S SERMONS

AFFECTIONS, Instincts, Principles, and Powers,
Impulse and Reason, Freedom and Control—
So men, unravelling God's harmonious whole,
Rend in a thousand shreds this life of ours.

Vain labour ! Deep and broad, where none may
see,
Spring the foundations of that shadowy throne
Where man's one nature, queen-like, sits alone,
Centred in a majestic unity ;

And rays her powers, like sister-islands seen
Linking their coral arms under the sea,
Or cluster'd peaks with plunging gulfs between

Spann'd by aerial arches all of gold,
Whereo'er the chariot wheels of life are roll'd
In cloudy circles to eternity.

EARLY POEMS

TO THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON

ON HEARING HIM MISPRAISED

BECAUSE thou hast believed, the wheels of life
Stand never idle, but go always round ;
Not by their hands, who vex the patient ground,
Moved only ; but by genius, in the strife

Of all its chafing torrents after thaw,
Urged ; and to feed whose movement, spinning
sand,
The feeble sons of pleasure set their hand ;
And, in this vision of the general law,

Hast labour'd, but with purpose ; hast become
Laborious, persevering, serious, firm—
For this, thy track, across the fretful foam

Of vehement actions without scope or term,
Call'd history, keeps a splendour ; due to wit,
Which saw one clue to life, and follow'd it.

SONNETS

IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

TO A PREACHER

‘IN harmony with Nature?’ Restless fool,
Who with such heat dost preach what were to
 thee,
When true, the last impossibility—
To be like Nature strong, like Nature cool !

Know, man hath all which Nature hath, but
 more,
And in that *more* lie all his hopes of good.
Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood ;
Nature is stubborn, man would fain adore ;

Nature is fickle, man hath need of rest ;
Nature forgives no debt, and fears no grave ;
Man would be mild, and with safe conscience
 blest.

Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends ;
Nature and man can never be fast friends.
Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave !

EARLY POEMS

TO GEORGE CRUIKSHANK

ON SEEING, IN THE COUNTRY, HIS PICTURE
OF 'THE BOTTLE'

ARTIST, whose hand, with horror wing'd, hath
 torn
From the rank life of towns this leaf ! and flung
The prodigy of full-blown crime among
Valleys and men to middle fortune born,

Not innocent, indeed, yet not forlorn—
Say, what shall calm us when such guests intrude
Like comets on the heavenly solitude ?
Shall breathless glades, cheer'd by shy Dian's
 horn,

Cold-bubbling springs, or caves ?—Not so ! The
 soul
Breasts her own griefs ; and, urged too fiercely,
 says :
' Why tremble ? True, the nobleness of man

May be by man effaced ; man can control
To pain, to death, the bent of his own days.
Know thou the worst ! So much, not more,
 he *can*.'

SONNETS

TO A REPUBLICAN FRIEND, 1848

God knows it, I am with you. If to prize
Those virtues, prized and practised by too few,
But prized, but loved, but eminent in you,
Man's fundamental life ; if to despise

The barren optimistic sophistries
Of comfortable moles, whom what they do
Teaches the limit of the just and true
(And for such doing they require not eyes) ;

If sadness at the long heart-wasting show
Wherein earth's great ones are disquieted ;
If thoughts, not idle, while before me flow

The armies of the homeless and unfed—
If these are yours, if this is what you are,
Then am I yours, and what you feel, I share.

EARLY POEMS

CONTINUED

YET, when I muse on what life is, I seem
Rather to patience prompted, than that proud
Prospect of hope which France proclaims so
 loud—

France, famed in all great arts, in none supreme ;

Seeing this vale, this earth, whereon we dream,
Is on all sides o'ershadow'd by the high
Uno'erleap'd Mountains of Necessity,
Sparing us narrower margin than we deem.

Nor will that day dawn at a human nod,
When, bursting through the network superposed
By selfish occupation—plot and plan,

Lust, avarice, envy—liberated man,
All difference with his fellow-mortal closed,
Shall be left standing face to face with God.

SONNETS

RELIGIOUS ISOLATION

TO THE SAME FRIEND

CHILDREN (as such forgive them) have I known,
Ever in their own eager pastime bent
To make the incurious bystander, intent
On his own swarming thoughts, an interest own—

Too fearful or too fond to play alone.
Do thou, whom light in thine own inmost soul
(Not less thy boast) illuminates, control
Wishes unworthy of a man full-grown.

What though the holy secret, which moulds thee,
Mould not the solid earth? though never winds
Have whisper'd it to the complaining sea,

Nature's great law, and law of all men's minds?—
To its own impulse every creature stirs;
Live by thy light, and earth will live by hers!

MYCERINUS²

‘ Not by the justice that my father spurn’d,
Not for the thousands whom my father slew,
Altars unfed and temples overturn’d,
Cold hearts and thankless tongues, where thanks
are due ;
Fell this dread voice from lips that cannot lie,
Stern sentence of the Powers of Destiny.

‘ I will unfold my sentence and my crime.
My crime—that, rapt in reverential awe,
I sate obedient, in the fiery prime
Of youth, self-govern’d, at the feet of Law ;
Ennobling this dull pomp, the life of kings,
By contemplation of diviner things.

‘ My father loved injustice, and lived long ;
Crown’d with grey hairs he died, and full of sway.
I loved the good he scorn’d, and hated wrong—
The Gods declare my recompence to-day.
I look’d for life more lasting, rule more high ;
And when six years are measured, lo, I die !

MYCERINUS

‘ Yet surely, O my people, did I deem
Man’s justice from the all-just Gods was given ;
A light that from some upper fount did beam,
Some better archetype, whose seat was heaven ;
A light that, shining from the blest abodes,
Did shadow somewhat of the life of Gods.

‘ Mere phantoms of man’s self-tormenting heart,
Which on the sweets that woo it dares not feed !
Vain dreams, which quench our pleasures, then
depart,
When the duped soul, self-master’d, claims its
meed ;
When, on the strenuous just man, Heaven be-
stows,
Crown of his struggling life, an unjust close !

‘ Seems it so light a thing, then, austere Powers,
To spurn man’s common lure, life’s pleasant
things ?
Seems there no joy in dances crown’d with
flowers,
Love, free to range, and regal banquetings ?
Bend ye on these, indeed, an unmoved eye,
Not Gods but ghosts, in frozen apathy ?

‘ Or is it that some Force, too wise, too strong,
Even for yourselves to conquer or beguile,
Sweeps earth, and heaven, and men, and gods
along,
Like the broad volume of the insurgent Nile ?

EARLY POEMS

And the great powers we serve, themselves may be
Slaves of a tyrannous necessity ?

‘ Or in mid-heaven, perhaps, your golden cars,
Where earthly voice climbs never, wing their
flight,

And in wild hunt, through mazy tracts of stars,
Sweep in the sounding stillness of the night ?
Or in deaf ease, on thrones of dazzling sheen,
Drinking deep draughts of joy, ye dwell serene ?

‘ Oh, wherefore cheat our youth, if thus it be,
Of one short joy, one lust, one pleasant dream ?
Stringing vain words of powers we cannot see,
Blind divinations of a will supreme ;
Lost labour ! when the circumambient gloom
But hides, if Gods, Gods careless of our doom ?

‘ The rest I give to joy. Even while I speak,
My sand runs short ; and—as yon star-shot ray,
Hemm’d by two banks of cloud, peers pale and
weak,

Now, as the barrier closes, dies away—
Even so do past and future intertwine,
Blotting this six years’ space, which yet is mine.

‘ Six years—six little years—six drops of time !
Yet suns shall rise, and many moons shall wane,
And old men die, and young men pass their
prime,
And languid pleasure fade and flower again,

MYCERINUS

And the dull Gods behold, ere these are flown,
Revels more deep, joy keener than their own.

‘ Into the silence of the groves and woods
I will go forth ; though something would I say—
Something—yet what, I know not ; for the
 Gods

The doom they pass revoke not, nor delay ;
And prayers, and gifts, and tears, are fruitless all,
And the night waxes, and the shadows fall.

‘ Ye men of Egypt, ye have heard your king !
I go, and I return not. But the will
Of the great Gods is plain ; and ye must bring
Ill deeds, ill passions, zealous to fulfil
Their pleasure, to their feet ; and reap their
 praise,
The praise of Gods, rich boon ! and length of
 days.’

—So spake he, half in anger, half in scorn ;
And one loud cry of grief and of amaze
Broke from his sorrowing people ; so he spake,
And turning, left them there ; and with brief
 pause,

Girt with a throng of revellers, bent his way
To the cool region of the groves he loved.
There by the river-banks he wander’d on,
From palm-grove on to palm-grove, happy trees,
Their smooth tops shining sunward, and beneath
Burying their unshinn’d stems in grass and flowers ;

EARLY POEMS

Where in one dream the feverish time of youth
Might fade in slumber, and the feet of joy
Might wander all day long and never tire.
Here came the king, holding high feast, at morn,
Rose-crown'd ; and ever, when the sun went
 down,
A hundred lamps beam'd in the tranquil gloom,
From tree to tree all through the twinkling
 grove,
Revealing all the tumult of the feast—
Flush'd guests, and golden goblets foam'd with
 wine ;
While the deep-burnish'd foliage overhead
Splinter'd the silver arrows of the moon.
It may be that sometimes his wondering soul
From the loud joyful laughter of his lips
Might shrink half startled, like a guilty man
Who wrestles with his dream ; as some pale
 shape
Gliding half hidden through the dusky stems,
Would thrust a hand before the lifted bowl,
Whispering : *A little space, and thou art mine !*
It may be on that joyless feast his eye
Dwelt with mere outward seeming ; he, within,
Took measure of his soul, and knew its strength,
And by that silent knowledge, day by day,
Was calm'd, ennobled, comforted, sustain'd.
It may be ; but not less his brow was smooth,
And his clear laugh fled ringing through the
 gloom,
And his mirth quail'd not at the mild reproof

MYCERINUS

Sigh'd out by winter's sad tranquillity ;
Nor, pall'd with its own fulness, ebb'd and died
In the rich languor of long summer-days ;
Nor wither'd when the palm-tree plumes, that
roof'd

With their mild dark his grassy banquet-hall,
Bent to the cold winds of the showerless spring ;
No, nor grew dark when autumn brought the
clouds.

So six long years he revell'd, night and day.
And when the mirth wax'd loudest, with dull
sound

Sometimes from the grove's centre echoes came,
To tell his wondering people of their king ;
In the still night, across the steaming flats,
Mix'd with the murmur of the moving Nile.

THE CHURCH OF BROU

I

The Castle

DOWN the Savoy valleys sounding,
Echoing round this castle old,
'Mid the distant mountain-chalets
Hark ! what bell for church is toll'd ?

In the bright October morning
Savoy's Duke had left his bride.
From the castle, past the drawbridge,
Flow'd the hunters' merry tide.

Steeds are neighing, gallants glittering ;
Gay, her smiling lord to greet,
From her mullion'd chamber-casement
Smiles the Duchess Marguerite.

From Vienna, by the Danube,
Here she came, a bride, in spring.
Now the autumn crisps the forest ;
Hunters gather, bugles ring.

THE CHURCH OF BROU

Hounds are pulling, prickers swearing,
Horses fret, and boar-spears glance.
Off!—They sweep the marshy forests,
Westward, on the side of France.

Hark! the game's on foot; they scatter!—
Down the forest-ridings lone,
Furious, single horsemen gallop—
Hark! a shout—a crash—a groan!

Pale and breathless, came the hunters;
On the turf dead lies the boar—
God! the Duke lies stretch'd beside him,
Senseless, weltering in his gore.

* * * *

In the dull October evening,
Down the leaf-strewn forest-road,
To the castle, past the drawbridge,
Came the hunters with their load.

In the hall, with sconces blazing,
Ladies waiting round her seat,
Clothed in smiles, beneath the daïs
Sate the Duchess Marguerite.

Hark! below the gates unbarring!
Tramp of men and quick commands!
'—'Tis my lord come back from hunting—'
And the Duchess claps her hands.

EARLY POEMS

Slow and tired, came the hunters—
Stopp'd in darkness in the court.
'—Ho, this way, ye laggard hunters !
To the hall! What sport? What
sport?'—

Slow they enter'd with their master ;
In the hall they laid him down.
On his coat were leaves and blood-stains,
On his brow an angry frown.

Dead her princely youthful husband
Lay before his youthful wife,
Bloody, 'neath the flaring sconces—
And the sight froze all her life.

* * * *

In Vienna, by the Danube,
Kings hold revel, gallants meet.
Gay of old amid the gayest
Was the Duchess Marguerite.

In Vienna, by the Danube,
Feast and dance her youth beguiled.
Till that hour she never sorrow'd ;
But from then she never smiled.

'Mid the Savoy mountain valleys
Far from town or haunt of man,
Stands a lonely church, unfinish'd,
Which the Duchess Maud began ;

THE CHURCH OF BROU

Old, that Duchess stern began it,
In grey age, with palsied hands ;
But she died while it was building,
And the Church unfinish'd stands—

Stands as erst the builders left it,
When she sank into her grave ;
Mountain greensward paves the chancel,
Harebells flower in the nave.

‘—In my castle all is sorrow,’
Said the Duchess Marguerite then ;
‘Guide me, some one, to the mountain !
We will build the Church again.’—

Sandall'd palmers, faring homeward,
Austrian knights from Syria came.
‘—Austrian wanderers bring, O warders !
Homage to your Austrian dame.’—

From the gate the warders answer'd :
‘—Gone, O knights, is she you knew !
Dead our Duke, and gone his Duchess ;
Seek her at the Church of Brou !’—

Austrian knights and march-worn palmers
Climb the winding mountain-way—
Reach the valley, where the Fabric
Rises higher day by day.

EARLY POEMS

Stones are sawing, hammers ringing ;
On the work the bright sun shines,
In the Savoy mountain-meadows,
By the stream, below the pines.

On her palfrey white the Duchess
Sate and watch'd her working train—
Flemish carvers, Lombard gilders,
German masons, smiths from Spain.

Clad in black, on her white palfrey,
Her old architect beside—
There they found her in the mountains,
Morn and noon and eventide.

There she sate, and watch'd the builders,
Till the Church was roof'd and done.
Last of all, the builders rear'd her
In the nave a tomb of stone.

On the tomb two forms they sculptured,
Lifelike in the marble pale—
One, the Duke in helm and armour ;
One, the Duchess in her veil.

Round the tomb the carved stone fret-work
Was at Easter-tide put on.
Then the Duchess closed her labours ;
And she died at the St. John.

THE CHURCH OF BROU

II

The Church

UPON the glistening leaden roof
Of the new Pile, the sunlight shines ;
 The stream goes leaping by.
The hills are clothed with pines sun-proof ;
'Mid bright green fields, below the pines,
 Stands the Church on high.
What Church is this, from men aloof?—
'Tis the Church of Brou.

At sunrise, from their dewy lair
Crossing the stream, the kine are seen
 Round the wall to stray—
The churchyard wall that clips the square
Of open hill-sward fresh and green
 Where last year they lay.
But all things now are order'd fair
Round the Church of Brou.

On Sundays, at the matin-chime,
The Alpine peasants, two and three,
 Climb up here to pray ;

EARLY POEMS

Burghers and dames, at summer's prime,
Ride out to church from Chambery,
 Dight with mantles gay.
But else it is a lonely time
Round the Church of Brou.

On Sundays, too, a priest doth come
From the wall'd town beyond the pass,
 Down the mountain-way ;
And then you hear the organ's hum,
You hear the white-robed priest say mass,
 And the people pray.
But else the woods and fields are dumb
Round the Church of Brou.

And after church, when mass is done,
The people to the nave repair
 Round the tomb to stray ;
And marvel at the Forms of stone,
And praise the chisell'd broideries rare—
 Then they drop away.
The princely Pair are left alone
In the Church of Brou.

THE CHURCH OF BROU

III

The Tomb

So rest, for ever rest, O princely Pair !
In your high church, 'mid the still mountain-air,
Where horn, and hound, and vassals, never come.
Only the blessed Saints are smiling dumb,
From the rich painted windows of the nave,
On aisle, and transept, and your marble grave ;
Where thou, young Prince ! shalt never more
arise

From the fringed mattress where thy Duchess
lies,

On autumn-mornings, when the bugle sounds,
And ride across the drawbridge with thy hounds
To hunt the boar in the crisp woods till eve ;
And thou, O Princess ! shalt no more receive,
Thou and thy ladies, in the hall of state,
The jaded hunters with their bloody freight,
Coming benighted to the castle-gate.

So sleep, for ever sleep, O marble Pair !
Or, if ye wake, let it be then, when fair
On the carved western front a flood of light
Streams from the setting sun, and colours bright

EARLY POEMS

Prophets, transfigured Saints, and Martyrs brave,
In the vast western window of the nave ;
And on the pavement round the Tomb there
glints

A chequer-work of glowing sapphire-tints,
And amethyst, and ruby—then unclose
Your eyelids on the stone where ye repose,
And from your broider'd pillows lift your heads,
And rise upon your cold white marble beds ;
And, looking down on the warm rosy tints,
Which chequer, at your feet, the illumined flints,
Say : *What is this ? we are in bliss—forgiven—
Behold the pavement of the courts of Heaven !*

Or let it be on autumn nights, when rain
Doth rustlingly above your heads complain
On the smooth leaden roof, and on the walls
Shedding her pensive light at intervals
The moon through the clere-story windows
shines,

And the wind washes through the mountain-
pines.

Then, gazing up 'mid the dim pillars high,
The foliaged marble forest where ye lie,

*Hush, ye will say, it is eternity !
This is the glimmering verge of Heaven, and these
The columns of the heavenly palaces !*

And, in the sweeping of the wind, your ear
The passage of the Angels' wings will hear,
And on the lichen-crustled leads above
The rustle of the eternal rain of love.

A MODERN SAPPHO

THEY are gone—all is still ! Foolish heart, dost
thou quiver ?

Nothing stirs on the lawn but the quick lilac-
shade.

Far up shines the house, and beneath flows the
river—

Here lean, my head, on this cold balustrade !

Ere he come—ere the boat by the shining-
branch'd border

Of dark elms shoot round, dropping down the
proud stream,

Let me pause, let me strive, in myself make
some order,

Ere their boat-music sound, ere their broider'd
flags gleam.

Last night we stood earnestly talking together ;
She enter'd—that moment his eyes turn'd
from me !

Fasten'd on her dark hair, and her wreath of
white heather—

As yesterday was, so to-morrow will be.

EARLY POEMS

Their love, let me know, must grow strong and
yet stronger,
Their passion burn more, ere it ceases to burn.
They must love—while they must! but the
hearts that love longer
Are rare—ah! most loves but flow once, and
return.

I shall suffer—but they will outlive their
affection ;
I shall weep—but their love will be cooling ;
and he,
As he drifts to fatigue, discontent, and dejection,
Will be brought, thou poor heart, how much
nearer to thee !

For cold is his eye to mere beauty, who, breaking
The strong band which passion around him
hath furl'd,
Disenchanted by habit, and newly awaking,
Looks languidly round on a gloom-buried
world.

Through that gloom he will see but a shadow
appearing,
Perceive but a voice as I come to his side—
But deeper their voice grows, and nobler their
bearing,
Whose youth in the fires of anguish hath died.

A MODERN SAPPHO

So, to wait !——But what notes down the wind,
hark ! are driving ?

'Tis he ! 'tis their flag, shooting round by the
trees !

—Let my turn, if it *will* come, be swift in
arriving !

Ah ! hope cannot long lighten torments like
these.

Hast thou yet dealt him, O life, thy full measure ?

World, have thy children yet bow'd at his
knee ?

Hast thou with myrtle-leaf crown'd him, O
pleasure ?

—Crown, crown him quickly, and leave him
for me !

REQUIESCAT

STREW on her roses, roses,
And never a spray of yew !
In quiet she reposes ;
Ah, would that I did too !

Her mirth the world required ;
She bathed it in smiles of glee.
But her heart was tired, tired,
And now they let her be.

Her life was turning, turning,
In mazes of heat and sound.
But for peace her soul was yearning,
And now peace laps her round.

Her cabin'd, ample spirit,
It flutter'd and fail'd for breath.
To-night it doth inherit
The vasty hall of death.

YOUTH AND CALM

'Tis death ! and peace, indeed, is here,
And ease from shame, and rest from fear.
There's nothing can disarm now
The smoothness of that limpid brow.
But is a calm like this, in truth,
The crowning end of life and youth,
And when this boon rewards the dead,
Are all debts paid, has all been said ?
And is the heart of youth so light,
Its step so firm, its eye so bright,
Because on its hot brow there blows
A wind of promise and repose
From the far grave, to which it goes ;
Because it hath the hope to come,
One day, to harbour in the tomb ?
Ah no, the bliss youth dreams is one
For daylight, for the cheerful sun,
For feeling nerves and living breath—
Youth dreams a bliss on this side death.
It dreams a rest, if not more deep,
More grateful than this marble sleep ;
It hears a voice within it tell :
Calm's not life's crown, though calm is well.
'Tis all perhaps which man acquires.
But 'tis not what our youth desires.

A MEMORY-PICTURE

LAUGH, my friends, and without blame
Lightly quit what lightly came ;
Rich to-morrow as to-day,
Spend as madly as you may !
I, with little land to stir,
Am the exacter labourer.

Ere the parting hour go by,
Quick, thy tablets, Memory !

Once I said : ' A face is gone
If too hotly mused upon ;
And our best impressions are
Those that do themselves repair.'
Many a face I so let flee,
Ah ! is faded utterly.

Ere the parting hour go by,
Quick, thy tablets, Memory !

Marguerite says : ' As last year went,
So the coming year 'll be spent ;
Some day next year, I shall be,
Entering heedless, kiss'd by thee.'

A MEMORY-PICTURE

Ah, I hope!—yet, once away,
What may chain us, who can say?
Ere the parting hour go by,
Quick, thy tablets, Memory!

Paint that lilac kerchief, bound
Her soft face, her hair around;
Tied under the archest chin
Mockery ever ambush'd in.
Let the fluttering fringes streak
All her pale, sweet-rounded cheek.
Ere the parting hour go by,
Quick, thy tablets, Memory!

Paint that figure's pliant grace
As she tow'rd me lean'd her face,
Half refused and half resign'd,
Murmuring: 'Art thou still unkind?'
Many a broken promise then
Was new made—to break again.
Ere the parting hour go by,
Quick, thy tablets, Memory!

Paint those eyes, so blue, so kind,
Eager tell-tales of her mind;
Paint, with their impetuous stress
Of enquiring tenderness,
Those frank eyes, where deep I see
An angelic gravity.
Ere the parting hour go by,
Quick, thy tablets, Memory!

EARLY POEMS

What, my friends, these feeble lines
Show, you say, my love declines ?
To paint ill as I have done,
Proves forgetfulness begun ?
Time's gay minions, pleased you see,
Time, your master, governs me ;
Pleased, you mock the fruitless cry :
' Quick, thy tablets, Memory !'

Ah, too true ! Time's current strong
Leaves us fixt to nothing long.
Yet, if little stays with man,
Ah, retain we all we can !
If the clear impression dies,
Ah, the dim remembrance prize !
Ere the parting hour go by,
Quick, thy tablets, Memory !

A DREAM

WAS it a dream? We sail'd, I thought we
sail'd,

Martin and I, down a green Alpine stream,
Border'd, each bank, with pines; the morning
sun,

On the wet umbrage of their glossy tops,
On the red pinings of their forest-floor,
Drew a warm scent abroad; behind the pines
The mountain-skirts, with all their sylvan change
Of bright-leaf'd chestnuts and moss'd walnut-
trees

And the frail scarlet-berried ash, began.
Swiss chalets glitter'd on the dewy slopes,
And from some swarded shelf, high up, there
came

Notes of wild pastoral music—over all
Ranged, diamond-bright, the eternal wall of
snow.

Upon the mossy rocks at the stream's edge,
Back'd by the pines, a plank-built cottage stood,
Bright in the sun; the climbing gourd-plant's
leaves

EARLY POEMS

Muffled its walls, and on the stone-strewn roof
Lay the warm golden gourds ; golden, within,
Under the eaves, peer'd rows of Indian corn.
We shot beneath the cottage with the stream.
On the brown, rude-carved balcony, two forms
Came forth—Olivia's, Marguerite ! and thine.
Clad were they both in white, flowers in their
 breast ;
Straw hats bedeck'd their heads, with ribbons
 blue,
Which danced, and on their shoulders, fluttering,
 play'd.
They saw us, they conferr'd ; their bosoms
 heaved,
And more than mortal impulse fill'd their eyes.
Their lips moved ; their white arms, waved
 eagerly,
Flash'd once, like falling streams ; we rose, we
 gazed.
One moment, on the rapid's top, our boat
Hung poised—and then the darting river of Life
(Such now, methought, it was), the river of Life,
Loud thundering, bore us by ; swift, swift it
 foam'd,
Black under cliffs it raced, round headlands
 shone.
Soon the plank'd cottage by the sun-warm'd
 pines
Faded—the moss—the rocks ; us burning plains,
Bristled with cities, us the sea received.

THE NEW SIRENS

IN the cedarn shadow sleeping,
Where cool grass and fragrant glooms
Forth at noon had lured me, creeping
From your darken'd palace rooms—
I, who in your train at morning
Stroll'd and sang with joyful mind,
Heard, in slumber, sounds of warning ;
Heard the hoarse boughs labour in the wind.

Who are they, O pensive Graces,
—For I dream'd they wore your forms—
Who on shores and sea-wash'd places
Scoop the shelves and fret the storms ?
Who, when ships are that way tending,
Troop across the flushing sands,
To all reefs and narrows wending,
With blown tresses, and with beckoning hands ?

Yet I see, the howling levels
Of the deep are not your lair ;
And your tragic-vaunted revels
Are less lonely than they were.

EARLY POEMS

Like those Kings with treasure steering
From the jewell'd lands of dawn,
Troops, with gold and gifts, appearing,
Stream all day through your enchanted lawn.

And we too, from upland valleys,
Where some Muse with half-curved frown
Leans her ear to your mad sallies
Which the charm'd winds never drown ;
By faint music guided, ranging
The scared glens, we wander'd on,
Left our awful laurels hanging,
And came heap'd with myrtles to your throne.

From the dragon-warder'd fountains
Where the springs of knowledge are,
From the watchers on the mountains,
And the bright and morning star ;
We are exiles, we are falling,
We have lost them at your call—
O ye false ones, at your calling
Seeking ceiled chambers and a palace-hall !

Are the accents of your luring
More melodious than of yore ?
Are those frail forms more enduring
Than the charms Ulysses bore ?
That we sought you with rejoicings,
Till at evening we descry
At a pause of Siren voicings
These vext branches and this howling sky? . . .

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THE NEW SIRENS

Oh, your pardon ! The uncouthness
Of that primal age is gone,
And the skin of dazzling smoothness
Screens not now a heart of stone.
Love has flush'd those cruel faces ;
And those slacken'd arms forgo
The delight of death-embraces,
And yon whitening bone-mounds do not grow.

' Ah,' you say ; ' the large appearance
Of man's labour is but vain,
And we plead as staunch adherence
Due to pleasure as to pain.'
Pointing to earth's careworn creatures,
' Come,' you murmur with a sigh :
' Ah ! we own diviner features,
Loftier bearing, and a prouder eye.

' Come,' you say, ' the hours were dreary ;
Dull did life in torpor fade ;
Time is lame, and we grew weary
In the slumbrous cedarn shade.
Round our hearts with long caresses,
With low sighings, Silence stole,
And her load of steaming tresses
Fell, like Ossa, on the climbing soul.

' Come,' you say, ' the soul is fainting
Till she search and learn her own,
And the wisdom of man's painting
Leaves her riddle half unknown.

EARLY POEMS

Come,' you say, ' the brain is seeking,
While the sovran heart is dead ;
Yet this glean'd, when Gods were speaking,
Rarer secrets than the toiling head.

' Come,' you say, ' opinion trembles,
Judgment shifts, convictions go ;
Life dries up, the heart dissembles—
Only, what we feel, we know.
Hath your wisdom felt emotions ?
Will it weep our burning tears ?
Hath it drunk of our love-potions
Crowning moments with the wealth of years ?'

—I am dumb. Alas, too soon all
Man's grave reasons disappear !
Yet, I think, at God's tribunal
Some large answer you shall hear.
But, for me, my thoughts are straying
Where at sunrise, through your vines,
On these lawns I saw you playing,
Hanging garlands on your odorous pines ;

When your showering locks enwound you,
And your heavenly eyes shone through ;
When the pine-boughs yielded round you,
And your brows were starr'd with dew ;
And immortal forms, to meet you,
Down the statued alleys came,
And through golden horns, to greet you,
Blew such music as a God may frame.

THE NEW SIRENS

Yes, I muse ! And if the dawning
Into daylight never grew,
If the glistening wings of morning
On the dry noon shook their dew,
If the fits of joy were longer,
Or the day were sooner done,
Or, perhaps, if hope were stronger,
No weak nursling of an earthly sun . . .
Pluck, pluck cypress, O pale maidens,
Dusk the hall with yew !

* * * *

For a bound was set to meetings,
And the sombre day dragg'd on ;
And the burst of joyful greetings,
And the joyful dawn, were gone.
For the eye grows fill'd with gazing,
And on raptures follow calms ;
And those warm locks men were praising,
Droop'd, unbraided, on your listless arms.

Storms unsmooth'd your folded valleys,
And made all your cedars frown ;
Leaves were whirling in the alleys
Which your lovers wander'd down.
—Sitting cheerless in your bowers,
The hands propping the sunk head,
Still they gall you, the long hours,
And the hungry thought, that must be fed !

EARLY POEMS

Is the pleasure that is tasted
Patient of a long review ?
Will the fire joy hath wasted,
Mused on, warm the heart anew ?
—Or, are those old thoughts returning,
Guests the dull sense never knew,
Stars, set deep, yet inly burning,
Germs, your untrimm'd passion overgrew ?

Once, like us, you took your station
Watchers for a purer fire ;
But you droop'd in expectation,
And you wearied in desire.
When the first rose flush was steeping
All the frore peak's awful crown,
Shepherds say, they found you sleeping
In some windless valley, farther down.

Then you wept, and slowly raising
Your dozed eyelids, sought again,
Half in doubt, they say, and gazing
Sadly back, the seats of men ;—
Snatch'd a turbid inspiration
From some transient earthly sun,
And proclaim'd your vain ovation
For those mimic raptures you had won. . . .

* * * *

With a sad, majestic motion,
With a stately, slow surprise,

THE NEW SIRENS

From their earthward-bound devotion
Lifting up your languid eyes—
Would you freeze my too loud boldness,
Dumbly smiling as you go,
One faint frown of distant coldness
Flitting fast across each marble brow ?

Do I brighten at your sorrow,
O sweet Pleaders ?—doth my lot
Find assurance in to-morrow
Of one joy, which you have not ?
O, speak once, and shame my sadness !
Let this sobbing, Phrygian strain,
Mock'd and baffled by your gladness,
Mar the music of your feasts in vain !

* * * *

Scent, and song, and light, and flowers !
Gust on gust, the harsh winds blow—
Come, bind up those ringlet showers !
Roses for that dreaming brow !
Come, once more that ancient lightness,
Glancing feet, and eager eyes !
Let your broad lamps flash the brightness
Which the sorrow-stricken day denies !

Through black depths of serried shadows,
Up cold aisles of buried glade ;
In the midst of river-meadows
Where the looming kine are laid ;

EARLY POEMS

From your dazzled windows streaming,
From your humming-festal room,
Deep and far, a broken gleaming
Reels and shivers on the ruffled gloom.

Where I stand, the grass is glowing ;
Doubtless you are passing fair !
But I hear the north wind blowing,
And I feel the cold night-air.
Can I look on your sweet faces,
And your proud heads backward thrown,
From this dusk of leaf-strewn places
With the dumb woods and the night alone ?

Yet, indeed, this flux of guesses—
Mad delight, and frozen calms—
Mirth to-day and vine-bound tresses,
And to-morrow—folded palms ;
Is this all ? this balanced measure ?
Could life run no happier way ?
Joyous, at the height of pleasure,
Passive at the nadir of dismay ?

But, indeed, this proud possession,
This far-reaching, magic chain,
Linking in a mad succession
Fits of joy and fits of pain—
Have you seen it at the closing ?
Have you track'd its clouded ways ?
Can your eyes, while fools are dozing,
Drop, with mine, adown life's latter days ?

THE NEW SIRENS

When a dreary dawn is wading
Through this waste of sunless greens,
When the flushing hues are fading
On the peerless cheek of queens ;
When the mean shall no more sorrow,
And the proudest no more smile ;
As old age, youth's fatal morrow,
Spreads its cold light wider all that while ?

Then, when change itself is over,
When the slow tide sets one way,
Shall you find the radiant lover,
Even by moments, of to-day ?
The eye wanders, faith is failing—
O, loose hands, and let it be !
Proudly, like a king bewailing,
O, let fall one tear, and set us free !

All true speech and large avowal
Which the jealous soul concedes ;
All man's heart which brooks bestowal,
All frank faith which passion breeds—
These we had, and we gave truly ;
Doubt not, what we had, we gave !
False we were not, nor unruly ;
Lodgers in the forest and the cave.

Long we wander'd with you, feeding
Our rapt souls on your replies,
In a wistful silence reading
All the meaning of your eyes.

EARLY POEMS

By moss-border'd statues sitting,
By well-heads, in summer days.
But we turn, our eyes are flitting—
See, the white east, and the morning rays !

And you too, O worshipp'd Graces,
Sylvan Gods of this fair shade !
Is there doubt on divine faces ?
Are the blessed Gods dismay'd ?
Can men worship the wan features,
The sunk eyes, the wailing tone,
Of unsphered, discrowned creatures,
Souls as little godlike as their own ?

Come, loose hands ! The winged fleetness
Of immortal feet is gone ;
And your scents have shed their sweetness,
And your flowers are overblown.
And your jewell'd gauds surrender
Half their glories to the day ;
Freely did they flash their splendour,
Freely gave it—but it dies away.

In the pines the thrush is waking—
Lo, yon orient hill in flames !
Scores of true love knots are breaking
At divorce which it proclaims.
When the lamps are paled at morning,
Heart quits heart and hand quits hand.
Cold in that unlovely dawning,
Loveless, rayless, joyless you shall stand !

THE NEW SIRENS

Pluck no more red roses, maidens,
Leave the lilies in their dew—
Pluck, pluck cypress, O pale maidens,
Dusk, oh, dusk the hall with yew !
—Shall I seek, that I may scorn her,
Her I loved at eventide ?
Shall I ask, what faded mourner
Stands, at daybreak, weeping by my side ?
Pluck, pluck cypress, O pale maidens !
Dusk the hall with yew !

THE VOICE

As the kindling glances,
Queen-like and clear,
Which the bright moon lances
From her tranquil sphere
At the sleepless waters
Of a lonely mere,
On the wild whirling waves, mournfully, mourn-
fully,
Shiver and die.

As the tears of sorrow
Mothers have shed—
Prayers that to-morrow
Shall in vain be sped
When the flower they flow for
Lies frozen and dead—
Fall on the throbbing brow, fall on the burning
breast,
Bringing no rest.

Like bright waves that fall
With a lifelike motion

THE VOICE

On the lifeless margin of the sparkling Ocean ;
A wild rose climbing up a mouldering wall—
A gush of sunbeams through a ruin'd hall—
Strains of glad music at a funeral—
 So sad, and with so wild a start
 To this deep-sober'd heart,
 So anxiously and painfully,
 So drearily and doubtfully,
And oh, with such intolerable change
 Of thought, such contrast strange,
O unforgotten voice, thy accents come,
Like wanderers from the world's extremity,
 Unto their ancient home !

In vain, all, all in vain,
They beat upon mine ear again,
Those melancholy tones so sweet and still.
Those lute-like tones which in the bygone year
 Did steal into mine ear—
Blew such a thrilling summons to my will,
 Yet could not shake it ;
Made my tost heart its very life-blood spill,
 Yet could not break it.

YOUTH'S AGITATIONS

WHEN I shall be divorced, some ten years hence,
From this poor present self which I am now ;
When youth has done its tedious vain expense
Of passions that for ever ebb and flow ;

Shall I not joy youth's heats are left behind,
And breathe more happy in an even clime ?—
Ah no, for then I shall begin to find
A thousand virtues in this hated time !

Then I shall wish its agitations back,
And all its thwarting currents of desire ;
Then I shall praise the heat which then I lack,
And call this hurrying fever, generous fire ;

And sigh that one thing only has been lent
To youth and age in common—discontent.

THE WORLD'S TRIUMPHS

So far as I conceive the world's rebuke
To him address'd who would recast her new,
Not from herself her fame of strength she took,
But from their weakness who would work her rue.

'Behold,' she cries, 'so many rages lull'd,
So many fiery spirits quite cool'd down ;
Look how so many valours, long undull'd,
After short commerce with me, fear my frown !

'Thou too, when thou against my crimes
wouldst cry,
Let thy foreboded homage check thy tongue !'—
The world speaks well ; yet might her foe reply :
'Are wills so weak ?—then let not mine wait
long !

'Hast thou so rare a poison ?—let me be
Keener to slay thee, lest thou poison me !'

STAGIRIUS³

THOU, who dost dwell alone—
Thou, who dost know thine own—
Thou, to whom all are known
From the cradle to the grave—

Save, oh ! save.

From the world's temptations,
From tribulations,
From that fierce anguish
Wherein we languish,
From that torpor deep
Wherein we lie asleep,

Heavy as death, cold as the grave,

Save, oh ! save.

When the soul, growing clearer,
Sees God no nearer ;
When the soul, mounting higher,
To God comes no nigher ;
But the arch-fiend Pride
Mounts at her side,
Foiling her high emprise,
Sealing her eagle eyes,

STAGIRIUS

And, when she fain would soar,
Makes idols to adore,
Changing the pure emotion
Of her high devotion,
To a skin-deep sense
Of her own eloquence ;
Strong to deceive, strong to enslave—
Save, oh ! save.

From the ingrain'd fashion
Of this earthly nature
That mars thy creature ;
From grief that is but passion,
From mirth that is but feigning,
From tears that bring no healing,
From wild and weak complaining,
Thine old strength revealing,
Save, oh ! save.

From doubt, where all is double ;
Where wise men are not strong,
Where comfort turns to trouble,
Where just men suffer wrong ;
Where sorrow treads on joy,
Where sweet things soonest cloy,
Where faiths are built on dust,
Where love is half mistrust,
Hungry, and barren, and sharp as the sea—
Oh ! set us free.

O let the false dream fly,
Where our sick souls do lie
Tossing continually !

EARLY POEMS

O where thy voice doth come
Let all doubts be dumb,
Let all words be mild,
All strifes be reconciled,
All pains beguiled !
Light bring no blindness,
Love no unkindness,
Knowledge no ruin,
Fear no undoing !
From the cradle to the grave,
Save, oh ! save.

HUMAN LIFE

WHAT mortal, when he saw,
Life's voyage done, his heavenly Friend,
Could ever yet dare tell him fearlessly :
'I have kept uninfringed my nature's law ;
The inly-written chart thou gavest me,
To guide me, I have steer'd by to the end' ?

Ah ! let us make no claim,
On life's incognisable sea,
To too exact a steering of our way ;
Let us not fret and fear to miss our aim,
If some fair coast have lured us to make stay,
Or some friend hail'd us to keep company.

Ay ! we would each fain drive
At random, and not steer by rule.
Weakness ! and worse, weakness bestow'd in vain !
Winds from our side the unsuiting consort rive,
We rush by coasts where we had lief remain ;
Man cannot, though he would, live chance's fool.

No ! as the foaming swath
Of torn-up water, on the main,

EARLY POEMS

Falls heavily away with long-drawn roar
On either side the black deep-furrow'd path
Cut by an onward-labouring vessel's prore,
And never touches the ship-side again ;

Even so we leave behind,
As, charter'd by some unknown Powers,
We stem across the sea of life by night,
The joys which were not for our use design'd ;—
The friends to whom we had no natural right,
The homes that were not destined to be ours.

TO A GIPSY CHILD BY THE
SEA-SHORE

DOUGLAS, ISLE OF MAN

Who taught this pleading to unpractised eyes ?
Who hid such import in an infant's gloom ?
Who lent thee, child, this meditative guise ?
Who mass'd, round that slight brow, these clouds
of doom ?

Lo ! sails that gleam a moment and are gone ;
The swinging waters, and the cluster'd pier.
Not idly Earth and Ocean labour on,
Nor idly do these sea-birds hover near.

But thou, whom superfluity of joy
Wafts not from thine own thoughts, nor longings
vain,
Nor weariness, the full-fed soul's annoy—
Remaining in thy hunger and thy pain ;

Thou, drugging pain by patience ; half averse
From thine own mother's breast, that knows not
thee ;

EARLY POEMS

With eyes which sought thine eyes thou didst
converse,
And that soul-searching vision fell on me.

Glooms that go deep as thine I have not known :
Moods of fantastic sadness, nothing worth.
Thy sorrow and thy calmness are thine own :
Glooms that enhance and glorify this earth.

What mood wears like complexion to thy woe ?
His, who in mountain glens, at noon of day,
Sits rapt, and hears the battle break below ?
—Ah ! thine was not the shelter, but the fray.

Some exile's, mindful how the past was glad ?
Some angel's, in an alien planet born ?
—No exile's dream was ever half so sad,
Nor any angel's sorrow so forlorn.

Is the calm thine of stoic souls, who weigh
Life well, and find it wanting, nor deplore ;
But in disdainful silence turn away,
Stand mute, self-centred, stern, and dream no
more ?

Or do I wait, to hear some grey-hair'd king
Unravel all his many-colour'd lore ;
Whose mind hath known all arts of governing,
Mused much, loved life a little, loathed it
more ?

TO A GIPSY CHILD

Down the pale cheek long lines of shadow slope,
Which years, and curious thought, and suffering
give.

—Thou hast foreknown the vanity of hope,
Foreseen thy harvest—yet proceed'st to live.

O meek anticipant of that sure pain
Whose sureness grey-hair'd scholars hardly learn !
What wonder shall time breed, to swell thy
strain ?

What heavens, what earth, what suns shalt thou
discern ?

Ere the long night, whose stillness brooks no star,
Match that funereal aspect with her pall,
I think, thou wilt have fathom'd life too far,
Have known too much——or else forgotten all.

The Guide of our dark steps a triple veil
Betwixt our senses and our sorrow keeps ;
Hath sown with cloudless passages the tale
Of grief, and eased us with a thousand sleeps.

Ah ! not the nectarous poppy lovers use,
Not daily labour's dull, Lethæan spring,
Oblivion in lost angels can infuse
Of the soil'd glory, and the trailing wing.

And though thou glean, what strenuous gleaners
may,

EARLY POEMS

In the throng'd fields where winning comes by
 strife ;

And though the just sun gild, as mortals pray,
Some reaches of thy storm-vext stream of life ;

Though that blank sunshine blind thee ; though
 the cloud

That sever'd the world's march and thine, be
 gone ;

Though ease dulls grace, and Wisdom be too
 proud

To halve a lodging that was all her own—

Once, ere the day decline, thou shalt discern,
Oh once, ere night, in thy success, thy chain !
Ere the long evening close, thou shalt return,
And wear this majesty of grief again.

A QUESTION

TO FAUSTA

Joy comes and goes, hope ebbs and flows
 Like the wave ;
Change doth unknit the tranquil strength of men.
 Love lends life a little grace,
 A few sad smiles ; and then,
 Both are laid in one cold place,
 In the grave.

Dreams dawn and fly, friends smile and die
 Like spring flowers ;
Our vaunted life is one long funeral.
 Men dig graves with bitter tears
 For their dead hopes ; and all,
 Mazed with doubts and sick with fears,
 Count the hours.

We count the hours ! These dreams of ours,
 False and hollow,
Do we go hence and find they are not dead ?
 Joys we dimly apprehend,
 Faces that smiled and fled,
 Hopes born here, and born to end,
 Shall we follow ?

IN UTRUMQUE PARATUS

If, in the silent mind of One all-pure,
 At first imagined lay
The sacred world ; and by procession sure
From those still deeps, in form and colour
 drest,
Seasons alternating, and night and day,
The long-mused thought to north, south, east,
 and west,
 Took then its all-seen way ;

O waking on a world which thus-wise springs !
 Whether it needs thee count
Betwixt thy waking and the birth of things
Ages or hours—O waking on life's stream !
By lonely pureness to the all-pure fount
(Only by this thou canst) the colour'd dream
 Of life remount !

Thin, thin the pleasant human noises grow,
 And faint the city gleams ;
Rare the lone pastoral huts—marvel not thou !
The solemn peaks but to the stars are known,

IN UTRUMQUE PARATUS

But to the stars, and the cold lunar beams ;
Alone the sun arises, and alone
 Spring the great streams.

But, if the wild unfather'd mass no birth
 In divine seats hath known ;
In the blank, echoing solitude if Earth,
Rocking her obscure body to and fro,
Ceases not from all time to heave and groan,
Unfruitful oft, and at her happiest throe
 Forms, what she forms, alone ;

O seeming sole to awake, thy sun-bathed head
 Piercing the solemn cloud
Round thy still dreaming brother-world out-
 spread !

O man, whom Earth, thy long-vezt mother, bare
Not without joy—so radiant, so endow'd
(Such happy issue crown'd her painful care)—
 Be not too proud !

Oh when most self-exalted most alone,
 Chief dreamer, own thy dream !
Thy brother-world stirs at thy feet unknown,
Who hath a monarch's hath no brother's part ;
Yet doth thine inmost soul with yearning teem.
—Oh, what a spasm shakes the dreamer's heart!
 '*I, too, but seem.*'

THE WORLD AND THE QUIETIST

TO CRITIAS

‘WHY, when the world’s great mind
Hath finally inclined,
Why,’ you say, Critias, ‘be debating still ?
Why, with these mournful rhymes
Learn’d in more languid climes,
Blame our activity
Who, with such passionate will,
Are what we mean to be ?’

Critias, long since, I know
(For Fate decreed it so),
Long since the world hath set its heart to live ;
Long since, with credulous zeal
It turns life’s mighty wheel,
Still doth for labourers send
Who still their labour give,
And still expects an end.

Yet, as the wheel flies round,
With no ungrateful sound
Do adverse voices fall on the world’s ear.

THE WORLD AND THE QUIETIST

Deafen'd by his own stir
The rugged labourer
Caught not till then a sense
So glowing and so near
Of his omnipotence.

So, when the feast grew loud,
In Susa's palace proud,
A white-robed slave stole to the Great King's
side.

He spake—the Great King heard ;
Felt the slow-rolling word
Swell his attentive soul ;
Breathed deeply as it died,
And drain'd his mighty bowl.

HORATIAN ECHO ⁴

(TO AN AMBITIOUS FRIEND)

OMIT, omit, my simple friend,
Still to enquire how parties tend,
Or what we fix with foreign powers.
If France and we are really friends,
And what the Russian Czar intends,
Is no concern of ours.

Us not the daily quickening race
Of the invading populace
Shall draw to swell that shouldering herd.
Mourn will we not your closing hour,
Ye imbeciles in present power,
Doom'd, pompous, and absurd !

And let us bear, that they debate
Of all the engine-work of state,
Of commerce, laws, and policy,
The secrets of the world's machine,
And what the rights of man may mean,
With readier tongue than we.

HORATIAN ECHO

Only, that with no finer art
They cloak the troubles of the heart
With pleasant smile, let us take care ;
Nor with a lighter hand dispose
Fresh garlands of this dewy rose,
 To crown Eugenia's hair.

Of little threads our life is spun,
And he spins ill, who misses one.
But is thy fair Eugenia cold ?
Yet Helen had an equal grace,
And Juliet's was as fair a face,
 And now their years are told.

The day approaches, when we must
Be crumbling bones and windy dust ;
And scorn us as our mistress may,
Her beauty will no better be
Than the poor face she slights in thee,
 When dawns that day, that day.

THE SECOND BEST

MODERATE tasks and moderate leisure,
Quiet living, strict-kept measure
Both in suffering and in pleasure—
'Tis for this thy nature yearns.

But so many books thou readest,
But so many schemes thou breedest,
But so many wishes feedest,
That thy poor head almost turns.

And (the world's so madly jangled,
Human things so fast entangled)
Nature's wish must now be strangled
For that best which she discerns.

So it *must* be ! yet, while leading
A strain'd life, while overfeeding,
Like the rest, his wit with reading,
No small profit that man earns,

THE SECOND BEST

Who through all he meets can steer him,
Can reject what cannot clear him,
Cling to what can truly cheer him ;
 Who each day more surely learns

That an impulse, from the distance
Of his deepest, best existence,
To the words, ' Hope, Light, Persistence,'
 Strongly sets and truly burns.

CONSOLATION

MIST clogs the sunshine.
Smoky dwarf houses
Hem me round everywhere ;
A vague dejection
Weighs down my soul.

Yet, while I languish,
Everywhere countless
Prospects unroll themselves,
And countless beings
Pass countless moods. 10

Far hence, in Asia,
On the smooth convent-roofs,
On the gilt terraces,
Of holy Lassa,
Bright shines the sun.

Grey time-worn marbles
Hold the pure Muses ;
In their cool gallery,
By yellow Tiber,
They still look fair. 20

CONSOLATION

Strange unloved uproar *
Shrills round their portal ;
Yet not on Helicon
Kept they more cloudless
Their noble calm.

Through sun-proof alleys
In a lone, sand-hemm'd
City of Africa,
A blind, led beggar,
Age-bow'd, asks alms.

No bolder robber
Erst abode ambush'd
Deep in the sandy waste ;
No clearer eyesight
Spied prey afar.

Saharan sand-winds
Sear'd his keen eyeballs ;
Spent is the spoil he won.
For him the present
Holds only pain.

Two young, fair lovers,
Where the warm June-wind,
Fresh from the summer fields
Plays fondly round them,
Stand, tranced in joy.

* Written during the siege of Rome by the French, 1849.

EARLY POEMS

With sweet, join'd voices,
And with eyes brimming :
' Ah,' they cry, ' Destiny,
Prolong the present !
Time, stand still here !' 56

The prompt stern Goddess
Shakes her head, frowning ;
Time gives his hour-glass
Its due reversal ;
Their hour is gone.

With weak indulgence
Did the just Goddess
Lengthen their happiness,
She lengthen'd also
Distress elsewhere. 60

— The hour, whose happy
Unalloy'd moments
I would eternalise,
Ten thousand mourners
Well pleased see end.

The bleak, stern hour,
Whose severe moments
I would annihilate,
Is pass'd by others
In warmth, light, joy. 70

CONSOLATION

Time, so complain'd of,
Who to no one man
Shows partiality,
Brings round to all men
Some undimm'd hours.

1844

1844

RESIGNATION

TO FAUSTA

*To die be given us, or attain !
Fierce work it were, to do again.*
So pilgrims, bound for Mecca, pray'd
At burning noon ; so warriors said,
Scarf'd with the cross, who watch'd the miles
Of dust which wreathed their struggling files
Down Lydian mountains ; so, when snows
Round Alpine summits, eddying, rose,
The Goth, bound Rome-wards ; so the Hun,
Crouch'd on his saddle, while the sun
Went lurid down o'er flooded plains
Through which the groaning Danube strains
To the drear Euxine ;—so pray all,
Whom labours, self-ordain'd, enthrall ;
Because they to themselves propose
On this side the all-common close
A goal which, gain'd, may give repose.
So pray they ; and to stand again
Where they stood once, to them were pain ;
Pain to thread back and to renew
Past straits, and currents long steer'd through.

RESIGNATION

But milder natures, and more free—
Whom an unblamed serenity
Hath freed from passions, and the state
Of struggle these necessitate ;
Whom schooling of the stubborn mind
Hath made, or birth hath found, resign'd—
These mourn not, that their goings pay
Obedience to the passing day.
These claim not every laughing Hour
For handmaid to their striding power ;
Each in her turn, with torch uprear'd,
To await their march ; and when appear'd,
Through the cold gloom, with measured race,
To usher for a destined space
(Her own sweet errands all forgone)
The too imperious traveller on.
These, Fausta, ask not this : nor thou,
Time's chafing prisoner, ask it now !

We left, just ten years since, you say,
That wayside inn we left to-day.⁵
Our jovial host, as forth we fare,
Shouts greeting from his easy chair.
High on a bank our leader stands,
Reviews and ranks his motley bands,
Makes clear our goal to every eye—
The valley's western boundary.
A gate swings to ! our tide hath flow'd
Already from the silent road.
The valley-pastures, one by one,
Are threaded, quiet in the sun ;

EARLY POEMS

And now beyond the rude stone bridge
Slopes gracious up the western ridge.
Its woody border, and the last
Of its dark upland farms is past—
Cool farms, with open-lying stores,
Under their burnish'd sycamores ;
All past ! and through the trees we glide,
Emerging on the green hill-side.
There climbing hangs, a far-seen sign,
Our wavering, many-colour'd line ;
There winds, upstreaming slowly still
Over the summit of the hill.
And now, in front, behold outspread
Those upper regions we must tread !
Mild hollows, and clear heathy swells,
The cheerful silence of the fells.
Some two hours' march with serious air,
Through the deep noontide heats we fare ;
The red-grouse, springing at our sound,
Skims, now and then, the shining ground ;
No life, save his and ours, intrudes
Upon these breathless solitudes.
O joy ! again the farms appear.
Cool shade is there, and rustic cheer ;
There springs the brook will guide us down,
Bright comrade, to the noisy town.
Lingering, we follow down ; we gain
The town, the highway, and the plain.
And many a mile of dusty way,
Parch'd and road-worn, we made that day ;
But, Fausta, I remember well,

RESIGNATION

That as the balmy darkness fell
We bathed our hands with speechless glee,
That night, in the wide-glimmering sea.

Once more we tread this self-same road,
Fausta, which ten years since we trod ;
Alone we tread it, you and I,
Ghosts of that boisterous company.
Here, where the brook shines, near its head,
In its clear, shallow, turf-fringed bed ;
Here, whence the eye first sees, far down,
Capp'd with faint smoke, the noisy town ;
Here sit we, and again unroll,
Though slowly, the familiar whole.
The solemn wastes of heathy hill
Sleep in the July sunshine still ;
The self-same shadows now, as then,
Play through this grassy upland glen ;
The loose dark stones on the green way
Lie strewn, it seems, where then they lay ;
On this mild bank above the stream,
(You crush them !) the blue gentians gleam.
Still this wild brook, the rushes cool,
The sailing foam, the shining pool !
These are not changed ; and we, you say,
Are scarce more changed, in truth, than
they.

The gipsies, whom we met below,
They, too, have long roam'd to and fro ;
They ramble, leaving, where they pass,

EARLY POEMS

Their fragments on the cumber'd grass.
And often to some kindly place
Chance guides the migratory race,
Where, though long wanderings intervene,
They recognise a former scene.
The dingy tents are pitch'd ; the fires
Give to the wind their wavering spires ;
In dark knots crouch round the wild flame
Their children, as when first they came ;
They see their shackled beasts again
Move, browsing, up the grey-wall'd lane.
Signs are not wanting, which might raise
The ghost in them of former days—
Signs are not wanting, if they would ;
Suggestions to disquietude.
For them, for all, time's busy touch,
While it mends little, troubles much.
Their joints grow stiffer—but the year
Runs his old round of dubious cheer ;
Chilly they grow—yet winds in March,
Still, sharp as ever, freeze and parch ;
They must live still—and yet, God knows,
Crowded and keen the country grows ;
It seems as if, in their decay,
The law grew stronger every day.
So might they reason, so compare,
Fausta, times past with times that are.
But no !—they rubb'd through yesterday
In their hereditary way,
And they will rub through, if they can,
To-morrow on the self-same plan,

RESIGNATION

Till death arrive to supersede,
For them, vicissitude and need.

The poet, to whose mighty heart
Heaven doth a quicker pulse impart,
Subdues that energy to scan
Not his own course, but that of man.
Though he move mountains, though his day
Be pass'd on the proud heights of sway,
Though he hath loosed a thousand chains,
Though he hath borne immortal pains,
Action and suffering though he know—
He hath not lived, if he lives so.
He sees, in some great-historied land,
A ruler of the people stand,
Sees his strong thought in fiery flood
Roll through the heaving multitude,
Exults—yet for no moment's space
Enviest the all-regarded place.
Beautiful eyes meet his—and he
Bears to admire uncravingly ;
They pass—he, mingled with the crowd,
Is in their far-off triumphs proud.
From some high station he looks down,
At sunset, on a populous town ;
Surveys each happy group, which fleets,
Toil ended, through the shining streets,
Each with some errand of its own—
And does not say : *I am alone.*
He sees the gentle stir of birth
When morning purifies the earth ;

EARLY POEMS

He leans upon a gate and sees
The pastures, and the quiet trees.
Low, woody hill, with gracious bound,
Folds the still valley almost round ;
The cuckoo, loud on some high lawn,
Is answer'd from the depth of dawn ;
In the hedge straggling to the stream,
Pale, dew-drench'd, half-shut roses gleam ;
But, where the farther side slopes down,
He sees the drowsy new-waked clown
In his white quaint-embroider'd frock
Make, whistling, tow'rd his mist-wreathed flock—
Slowly, behind his heavy tread,
The wet, flower'd grass heaves up its head.
Lean'd on his gate, he gazes—tears
Are in his eyes, and in his ears
The murmur of a thousand years.
Before him he sees life unroll,
A placid and continuous whole—
That general life, which does not cease,
Whose secret is not joy, but peace ;
That life, whose dumb wish is not miss'd
If birth proceeds, if things subsist ;
The life of plants, and stones, and rain,
The life he craves—if not in vain
Fate gave, what chance shall not control,
His sad lucidity of soul.

You listen—but that wandering smile,
Fausta, betrays you cold the while !
Your eyes pursue the bells of foam

RESIGNATION

Wash'd, eddying, from this bank, their home.
*Those gipsies, so your thoughts I scan,
Are less, the poet more, than man.
They feel not, though they move and see ;
Deeper the poet feels ; but he
Breathes, when he will, immortal air,
Where Orpheus and where Homer are.
In the day's life, whose iron round
Hems us all in, he is not bound ;
He leaves his kind, o'erleaps their pen,
And flees the common life of men.
He escapes thence, but we abide—
Not deep the poet sees, but wide.*

The world in which we live and move
Outlasts aversion, outlasts love,
Outlasts each effort, interest, hope,
Remorse, grief, joy ;—and were the scope
Of these affections wider made,
Man still would see, and see dismay'd,
Beyond his passion's widest range,
Far regions of eternal change.
Nay, and since death, which wipes out man,
Finds him with many an unsolved plan,
With much unknown, and much untried,
Wonder not dead, and thirst not dried,
Still gazing on the ever full
Eternal mundane spectacle—
This world in which we draw our breath,
In some sense, Fausta, outlasts death.

EARLY POEMS

Blame thou not, therefore, him who dares
Judge vain beforehand human cares ;
Whose natural insight can discern
What through experience others learn ;
Who needs not love and power, to know
Love transient, power an unreal show ;
Who treads at ease life's uncheer'd ways—
Him blame not, Fausta, rather praise !
Rather thyself for some aim pray
Nobler than this, to fill the day ;
Rather that heart, which burns in thee,
Ask, not to amuse, but to set free ;
Be passionate hopes not ill resign'd
For quiet, and a fearless mind.
And though fate grudge to thee and me
The poet's rapt security,
Yet they, believe me, who await
No gifts from chance, have conquer'd fate,
They, winning room to see and hear,
And to men's business not too near,
Through clouds of individual strife
Draw homeward to the general life.
Like leaves by suns not yet uncurl'd ;
To the wise, foolish ; to the world,
Weak ;—yet not weak, I might reply,
Not foolish, Fausta, in His eye,
To whom each moment in its race,
Crowd as we will its neutral space,
Is but a quiet watershed
Whence, equally, the seas of life and death are
fed.

RESIGNATION

Enough, we live !—and if a life,
With large results so little rife,
Though bearable, seem hardly worth
This pomp of worlds, this pain of birth ;
Yet, Fausta, the mute turf we tread,
The solemn hills around us spread,
This stream which falls incessantly,
The strange-scrawl'd rocks, the lonely sky,
If I might lend their life a voice,
Seem to bear rather than rejoice.
And even could the intemperate prayer
Man iterates, while these forbear,
For movement, for an ampler sphere,
Pierce Fate's impenetrable ear ;
Not milder is the general lot
Because our spirits have forgot,
In action's dizzying eddy whirl'd,
The something that infects the world.

NARRATIVE POEMS

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM ⁶

AN EPISODE

AND the first grey of morning fill'd the east,
And the fog rose out of the Oxus stream.
But all the Tartar camp along the stream
Was hush'd, and still the men were plunged in
sleep ;

Sohrab alone, he slept not ; all night long
He had lain wakeful, tossing on his bed ;
But when the grey dawn stole into his tent,
He rose, and clad himself, and girt his sword,
And took his horseman's cloak; and left his tent,
And went abroad into the cold wet fog,
Through the dim camp to Peran-Wisa's tent.

Through the black Tartar tents he pass'd,
which stood

Clustering like bee-hives on the low flat strand
Of Oxus, where the summer-floods o'erflow
When the sun melts the snows in high Pamere ;
Through the black tents he pass'd, o'er that low
strand,

And to a hillock came, a little back

NARRATIVE POEMS

From the stream's brink—the spot where first a
boat,

Crossing the stream in summer, scrapes the land.
The men of former times had crown'd the top
With a clay fort ; but that was fall'n, and now
The Tartars built there Peran-Wisa's tent,
A dome of laths, and o'er it felts were spread.
And Sohrab came there, and went in, and stood
Upon the thick piled carpets in the tent,
And found the old man sleeping on his bed
Of rugs and felts, and near him lay his arms.
And Peran-Wisa heard him, though the step
Was dull'd ; for he slept light, an old man's
sleep ;

And he rose quickly on one arm, and said :—
' Who art thou ? for it is not yet clear dawn.
Speak ! is there news, or any night alarm ? '

But Sohrab came to the bedside, and said :—
' Thou know'st me, Peran-Wisa ! it is I.
The sun is not yet risen, and the foe
Sleep ; but I sleep not ; all night long I lie
Tossing and wakeful, and I come to thee.
For so did King Afrasiab bid me seek
Thy counsel, and to heed thee as thy son,
In Samarcand, before the army march'd ;
And I will tell thee what my heart desires.
Thou know'st if, since from Ader-baijan first
I came among the Tartars and bore arms,
I have still served Afrasiab well, and shown,
At my boy's years, the courage of a man.
This too thou know'st, that while I still bear on

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

The conquering Tartar ensigns through the
world,

And beat the Persians back on every field,
I seek one man, one man, and one alone—
Rustum, my father ; who I hoped should greet,
Should one day greet, upon some well-fought
field,

His not unworthy, not inglorious son.
So I long hoped, but him I never find.
Come then, hear now, and grant me what I ask.
Let the two armies rest to-day ; but I
Will challenge forth the bravest Persian lords
To meet me, man to man ; if I prevail,
Rustum will surely hear it ; if I fall—
Old man, the dead need no one, claim no kin.
Dim is the rumour of a common fight,
Where host meets host, and many names are
sunk ;

But of a single combat fame speaks clear.'

He spoke ; and Peran-Wisa took the hand
Of the young man in his, and sigh'd, and said :—

' O Sohrab, an unquiet heart is thine !
Canst thou not rest among the Tartar chiefs,
And share the battle's common chance with us
Who love thee, but must press for ever first,
In single fight incurring single risk,
To find a father thou hast never seen ?
That were far best, my son, to stay with us
Unmurmuring ; in our tents, while it is war,
And when 'tis truce, then in Afrasiab's towns.
But, if this one desire indeed rules all,

NARRATIVE POEMS

To seek out Rustum—seek him not through
fight !

Seek him in peace, and carry to his arms,
O Sohrab, carry an unwounded son !
But far hence seek him, for he is not here.
For now it is not as when I was young,
When Rustum was in front of every fray ;
But now he keeps apart, and sits at home,
In Seistan, with Zal, his father old.

Whether that his own mighty strength at last
Feels the abhorr'd approaches of old age,
Or in some quarrel with the Persian King.
There go !—Thou wilt not ? Yet my heart
forebodes

Danger or death awaits thee on this field.
Fain would I know thee safe and well, though
lost

To us ; fain therefore send thee hence, in peace
To seek thy father, not seek single fights
In vain ;—but who can keep the lion's cub
From ravening, and who govern Rustum's son ?
Go, I will grant thee what thy heart desires.'

So said he, and dropp'd Sohrab's hand, and left
His bed, and the warm rugs whereon he lay ;
And o'er his chilly limbs his woollen coat
He pass'd, and tied his sandals on his feet,
And threw a white cloak round him, and he
took

In his right hand a ruler's staff, no sword ;
And on his head he set his sheep-skin cap,
Black, glossy, curl'd, the fleece of Kara-Kul ;

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

And raised the curtain of his tent, and call'd
His herald to his side, and went abroad.

The sun by this had risen, and clear'd the fog
From the broad Oxus and the glittering sands.
And from their tents the Tartar horsemen filed
Into the open plain ; so Haman bade—
Haman, who next to Peran-Wisa ruled
The host, and still was in his lusty prime.
From their black tents, long files of horse, they
stream'd ;

As when some grey November morn the files,
In marching order spread, of long-neck'd cranes
Stream over Casbin and the southern slopes
Of Elburz, from the Aralian estuaries,
Or some froze Caspian reed-bed, southward bound
For the warm Persian sea-board—so they stream'd.
The Tartars of the Oxus, the King's guard,
First, with black sheep-skin caps and with long
spears ;

Large men, large steeds ; who from Bokhara
come

And Khiva, and ferment the milk of mares.
Next, the more temperate Toorkmuns of the
south,

The Tukas, and the lances of Salore,
And those from Attruck and the Caspian sands ;
Light men and on light steeds, who only drink
The acrid milk of camels, and their wells.
And then a swarm of wandering horse, who came
From far, and a more doubtful service own'd ;
The Tartars of Ferghana, from the banks

NARRATIVE POEMS

Of the Jaxartes, men with scanty beards
And close-set skull-caps ; and those wilder hordes
Who roam o'er Kipchak and the northern waste,
Kalmucks and unkempt Kuzzaks, tribes who
stray

Nearest the Pole, and wandering Kirghizzes,
Who come on shaggy ponies from Pamere ;
These all filed out from camp into the plain.
And on the other side the Persians form'd ;—
First a light cloud of horse, Tartars they seem'd,
The Ilyats of Khorassan ; and behind,
The royal troops of Persia, horse and foot,
Marshall'd battalions bright in burnish'd steel.
But Peran-Wisa with his herald came,
Threading the Tartar squadrons to the front,
And with his staff kept back the foremost ranks.
And when Ferood, who led the Persians, saw
That Peran-Wisa kept the Tartars back,
He took his spear, and to the front he came,
And check'd his ranks, and fix'd them where
they stood.

And the old Tartar came upon the sand
Betwixt the silent hosts, and spake, and said :—
' Ferood, and ye, Persians and Tartars, hear !
Let there be truce between the hosts to-day.
But choose a champion from the Persian lords
To fight our champion Sohrab, man to man.'

As, in the country, on a morn in June,
When the dew glistens on the pearled ears,
A shiver runs through the deep corn for joy—
So, when they heard what Peran-Wisa said,

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

A thrill through all the Tartar squadrons ran
Of pride and hope for Sohrab, whom they loved.

But as a troop of pedlars, from Cabool,
Cross underneath the Indian Caucasus,
That vast sky-neighbouring mountain of milk
snow ;

Crossing so high, that, as they mount, they pass
Long flocks of travelling birds dead on the snow,
Choked by the air, and scarce can they them-
selves

Slake their parch'd throats with sugar'd mul-
berries—

In single file they move, and stop their breath,
For fear they should dislodge the o'erhanging
snows—

So the pale Persians held their breath with fear.

And to Ferood his brother chiefs came up
To counsel ; Gudurz and Zoarrah came,
And Feraburz, who ruled the Persian host
Second, and was the uncle of the King ;
These came and counsell'd, and then Gudurz
said :—

' Ferood, shame bids us take their challenge up,
Yet champion have we none to match this youth.
He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart.
But Rustum came last night ; aloof he sits
And sullen, and has pitch'd his tents apart.
Him will I seek, and carry to his ear
The Tartar challenge, and this young man's name.
Haply he will forget his wrath, and fight.
Stand forth the while, and take their challenge up.'

NARRATIVE POEMS

So spake he ; and Ferood stood forth and
cried :—

‘ Old man, be it agreed as thou hast said !
Let Sohrab arm, and we will find a man.’

He spake : and Peran-Wisa turn’d, and strode
Back through the opening squadrons to his tent.
But through the anxious Persians Gudurz ran,
And cross’d the camp which lay behind, and
reach’d,

Out on the sands beyond it, Rustum’s tents.
Of scarlet cloth they were, and glittering gay,
Just pitch’d ; the high pavilion in the midst
Was Rustum’s, and his men lay camp’d around.
And Gudurz enter’d Rustum’s tent, and found
Rustum ; his morning meal was done, but still
The table stood before him, charged with food—
A side of roasted sheep, and cakes of bread,
And dark green melons ; and there Rustum sate
Listless, and held a falcon on his wrist,
And play’d with it ; but Gudurz came and stood
Before him ; and he look’d, and saw him stand,
And with a cry sprang up and dropp’d the bird,
And greeted Gudurz with both hands, and said :—

‘ Welcome ! these eyes could see no better
sight.

What news ? but sit down first, and eat and drink.’

But Gudurz stood in the tent-door, and said :—
‘ Not now ! a time will come to eat and drink,
But not to-day ; to-day has other needs.
The armies are drawn out, and stand at gaze ;
For from the Tartars is a challenge brought

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

To pick a champion from the Persian lords
To fight their champion—and thou know'st his
name—

Sohrab men call him, but his birth is hid.
O Rustum, like thy might is this young man's !
He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart ;
And he is young, and Iran's chiefs are old,
Or else too weak ; and all eyes turn to thee.
Come down and help us, Rustum, or we lose !'

He spoke ; but Rustum answer'd with a
smile :—

'Go to ! if Iran's chiefs are old, then I
Am older ; if the young are weak, the King
Errs strangely ; for the King, for Kai Khosroo,
Himself is young, and honours younger men,
And lets the aged moulder to their graves.
Rustum he loves no more, but loves the young—
The young may rise at Sohrab's vaunts, not I.
For what care I, though all speak Sohrab's fame ?
For would that I myself had such a son,
And not that one slight helpless girl I have—
A son so famed, so brave, to send to war,
And I to tarry with the snow-hair'd Zal,
My father, whom the robber Afghans vex,
And clip his borders short, and drive his herds,
And he has none to guard his weak old age.
There would I go, and hang my armour up,
And with my great name fence that weak old
man,

And spend the goodly treasures I have got,
And rest my age, and hear of Sohrab's fame,

NARRATIVE POEMS

And leave to death the hosts of thankless kings,
And with these slaughterous hands draw sword
no more.'

He spoke, and smiled; and Gudurz made
reply :—

'What then, O Rustum, will men say to this,
When Sohrab dares our bravest forth, and seeks
Thee most of all, and thou, whom most he seeks,
Hidest thy face? Take heed lest men should
say:

*Like some old miser, Rustum hoards his fame,
And shuns to peril it with younger men.'*

And, greatly moved, then Rustum made
reply :—

'O Gudurz, wherefore dost thou say such words?
Thou knowest better words than this to say.
What is one more, one less, obscure or famed,
Valiant or craven, young or old, to me?
Are not they mortal, am not I myself?
But who for men of nought would do great deeds?
Come, thou shalt see how Rustum hoards his
fame!

But I will fight unknown, and in plain arms;
Let not men say of Rustum, he was match'd
In single fight with any mortal man.'

He spoke, and frown'd; and Gudurz turn'd,
and ran

Back quickly through the camp in fear and joy—
Fear at his wrath, but joy that Rustum came.
But Rustum strode to his tent-door, and call'd
His followers in, and bade them bring his arms,

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

And clad himself in steel ; the arms he chose
Were plain, and on his shield was no device,
Only his helm was rich, inlaid with gold,
And, from the fluted spine atop, a plume
Of horsehair waved, a scarlet horsehair plume.
So arm'd, he issued forth ; and Ruksh, his horse,
Follow'd him like a faithful hound at heel—
Ruksh, whose renown was noised through all
the earth ;

The horse, whom Rustum on a foray once
Did in Bokhara by the river find
A colt beneath its dam, and drove him home,
And rear'd him ; a bright bay, with lofty crest,
Dight with a saddle-cloth of broider'd green
Crusted with gold, and on the ground were work'd
All beasts of chase, all beasts which hunters know.
So follow'd, Rustum left his tents, and cross'd
The camp, and to the Persian host appear'd.
And all the Persians knew him, and with shouts
Hail'd ; but the Tartars knew not who he was.
And dear as the wet diver to the eyes
Of his pale wife who waits and weeps on shore,
By sandy Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf,
Plunging all day in the blue waves, at night,
Having made up his tale of precious pearls,
Rejoins her in their hut upon the sands—
So dear to the pale Persians Rustum came.

And Rustum to the Persian front advanced,
And Sohrab arm'd in Haman's tent, and came.
And as afield the reapers cut a swath
Down through the middle of a rich man's corn,

NARRATIVE POEMS

And on each side are squares of standing corn,
And in the midst a stubble, short and bare—
So on each side were squares of men, with spears
Bristling, and in the midst, the open sand.
And Rustum came upon the sand, and cast
His eyes toward the Tartar tents, and saw
Sohrab come forth, and eyed him as he came.

As some rich woman, on a winter's morn,
Eyes through her silken curtains the poor drudge
Who with numb blacken'd fingers makes her
fire—

At cock-crow, on a starlit winter's morn,
When the frost flowers the whiten'd window-
panes—

And wonders how she lives, and what the thoughts
Of that poor drudge may be ; so Rustum eyed
The unknown adventurous youth, who from afar
Came seeking Rustum, and defying forth
All the most valiant chiefs ; long he perused
His spirited air, and wonder'd who he was.
For very young he seem'd, tenderly rear'd ;
Like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and
straight,

Which in a queen's secluded garden throws
Its slight dark shadow on the moonlit turf,
By midnight, to a bubbling fountain's sound—
So slender Sohrab seem'd, so softly rear'd.
And a deep pity enter'd Rustum's soul
As he beheld him coming ; and he stood,
And beckon'd to him with his hand, and said :—

‘ O thou young man, the air of Heaven is soft,

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

And warm, and pleasant ; but the grave is cold !
Heaven's air is better than the cold dead grave.
Behold me ! I am vast, and clad in iron,
And tried ; and I have stood on many a field
Of blood, and I have fought with many a foe—
Never was that field lost, or that foe saved.
O Sohrab, wherefore wilt thou rush on death ?
Be govern'd ! quit the Tartar host, and come
To Iran, and be as my son to me,
And fight beneath my banner till I die !
There are no youths in Iran brave as thou.'

So he spake, mildly ; Sohrab heard his voice,
The mighty voice of Rustum, and he saw
His giant figure planted on the sand,
Sole, like some single tower, which a chief
Hath builded on the waste in former years
Against the robbers ; and he saw that head,
Streak'd with its first grey hairs ;—hope filled
his soul,

And he ran forward and embraced his knees,
And clasp'd his hand within his own, and said :—

'O, by thy father's head ! by thine own soul !
Art thou not Rustum ? speak ! art thou not he ?'

But Rustum eyed askance the kneeling youth,
And turn'd away, and spake to his own soul :—

'Ah me, I muse what this young fox may
mean !

False, wily, boastful, are these Tartar boys.
For if I now confess this thing he asks,
And hide it not, but say : *Rustum is here !*
He will not yield indeed, nor quit our foes,

NARRATIVE POEMS

But he will find some pretext not to fight,
And praise my fame, and proffer courteous gifts,
A belt or sword perhaps, and go his way.
And on a feast-tide, in Afrasiab's hall,
In Samarcand, he will arise and cry :
“ I challenged once, when the two armies camp'd
Beside the Oxus, all the Persian lords
To cope with me in single fight ; but they
Shrank, only Rustum dared ; then he and I
Changed gifts, and went on equal terms away.”
So will he speak, perhaps, while men applaud ;
Then were the chiefs of Iran shamed through me.’

And then he turn'd, and sternly spake aloud :—
‘ Rise ! wherefore dost thou vainly question thus
Of Rustum ? I am here, whom thou hast call'd
By challenge forth ; make good thy vaunt, or
yield !

Is it with Rustum only thou wouldst fight ?
Rash boy, men look on Rustum's face and flee !
For well I know, that did great Rustum stand
Before thy face this day, and were reveal'd,
There would be then no talk of fighting more.
But being what I am, I tell thee this—
Do thou record it in thine inmost soul :
Either thou shalt renounce thy vaunt and yield,
Or else thy bones shall strew this sand, till winds
Bleach them, or Oxus with his summer-floods,
Oxus in summer wash them all away.’

He spoke ; and Sohrab answer'd, on his feet :—
‘ Art thou so fierce ? Thou wilt not fright
me so !

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

I am no girl, to be made pale by words.
Yet this thou hast said well, did Rustum stand
Here on this field, there were no fighting then.
But Rustum is far hence, and we stand here.
Begin ! thou art more vast, more dread than I,
And thou art proved, I know, and I am young—
But yet success sways with the breath of Heaven.
And though thou thinkest that thou knowest
sure

Thy victory, yet thou canst not surely know.
For we are all, like swimmers in the sea,
Poised on the top of a huge wave of fate,
Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall.
And whether it will heave us up to land,
Or whether it will roll us out to sea,
Back out to sea, to the deep waves of death,
We know not, and no search will make us
know ;

Only the event will teach us in its hour.'

He spoke, and Rustum answer'd not, but
hurl'd

His spear ; down from the shoulder, down it
came,

As on some partridge in the corn a hawk,
That long has tower'd in the airy clouds,
Drops like a plummet ; Sohrab saw it come,
And sprang aside, quick as a flash ; the spear
Hiss'd, and went quivering down into the sand,
Which it sent flying wide ;—then Sohrab threw
In turn, and full struck Rustum's shield ; sharp
rang,

NARRATIVE POEMS

The iron plates rang sharp, but turn'd the spear.
And Rustum seized his club, which none but he
Could wield ; an unlopp'd trunk it was, and
 huge,

Still rough—like those which men in treeless
 plains

To build them boats fish from the flooded rivers,
Hyphasis or Hydaspes, when, high up

By their dark springs, the wind in winter-time
Hath made in Himalayan forests wrack,

And strewn the channels with torn boughs—so
 huge

The club which Rustum lifted now, and struck
One stroke ; but again Sohrab sprang aside,

Lithe as the glancing snake, and the club came
Thundering to earth, and leapt from Rustum's
 hand.

And Rustum follow'd his own blow, and fell
To his knees, and with his fingers clutch'd the
 sand ;

And now might Sohrab have unsheathed his
 sword,

And pierced the mighty Rustum while he lay
Dizzy, and on his knees, and choked with sand ;
But he look'd on, and smiled, nor bared his
 sword,

But courteously drew back, and spoke, and
 said :—

‘Thou strik'st too hard ! that club of thine
 will float

Upon the summer-floods, and not my bones.

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

But rise, and be not wroth ! not wroth am I ;
No, when I see thee, wrath forsakes my soul.
Thou say'st, thou art not Rustum ; be it so !
Who art thou then, that canst so touch my soul ?
Boy as I am, I have seen battles too—
Have waded foremost in their bloody waves,
And heard their hollow roar of dying men ;
But never was my heart thus touch'd before.
Are they from Heaven, these softenings of the
heart ?

O thou old warrior, let us yield to Heaven !
Come, plant we here in earth our angry spears,
And make a truce, and sit upon this sand,
And pledge each other in red wine, like friends,
And thou shalt talk to me of Rustum's deeds.
There are enough foes in the Persian host,
Whom I may meet, and strike, and feel no pang ;
Champions enough Afrasiab has, whom thou
Mayst fight ; fight *them*, when they confront thy
spear !

But oh, let there be peace 'twixt thee and me !'

He ceased, but while he spake, Rustum had
risen,
And stood erect, trembling with rage ; his club
He left to lie, but had regain'd his spear,
Whose fiery point now in his mail'd right-hand
Blazed bright and baleful, like that autumn-star,
The baleful sign of fevers ; dust had soil'd
His stately crest, and dimm'd his glittering arms.
His breast heaved, his lips foam'd, and twice his
voice

NARRATIVE POEMS

Was choked with rage ; at last these words broke
way :—

‘ Girl ! nimble with thy feet, not with thy
hands !

Curl’d minion, dancer, coiner of sweet words !

Fight, let me hear thy hateful voice no more !

Thou art not in Afrasiab’s gardens now

With Tartar girls, with whom thou art wont to
dance ;

But on the Oxus-sands, and in the dance

Of battle, and with me, who make no play

Of war ; I fight it out, and hand to hand.

Speak not to me of truce, and pledge, and wine !

Remember all thy valour ; try thy feints

And cunning ! all the pity I had is gone ;

Because thou hast shamed me before both the
hosts

With thy light skipping tricks, and thy girl’s
wiles.’

He spoke, and Sohrab kindled at his taunts,

And he too drew his sword ; at once they rush’d

Together, as two eagles on one prey

Come rushing down together from the clouds,

One from the east, one from the west ; their
shields

Dash’d with a clang together, and a din

Rose, such as that the sinewy woodcutters

Make often in the forest’s heart at morn,

Of hewing axes, crashing trees—such blows

Rustum and Sohrab on each other hail’d.

And you would say that sun and stars took part

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

In that unnatural conflict ; for a cloud
Grew suddenly in Heaven, and dark'd the sun
Over the fighters' heads ; and a wind rose
Under their feet, and moaning swept the plain,
And in a sandy whirlwind wrapp'd the pair.
In gloom they twain were wrapp'd, and they
alone ;

For both the on-looking hosts on either hand
Stood in broad daylight, and the sky was pure,
And the sun sparkled on the Oxus stream.
But in the gloom they fought, with bloodshot
eyes

And labouring breath ; first Rustum struck the
shield

Which Sohrab held stiff out ; the steel-spiked
spear

Rent the tough plates, but fail'd to reach the
skin,

And Rustum pluck'd it back with angry groan.
Then Sohrab with his sword smote Rustum's
helm,

Nor clove its steel quite through ; but all the
crest

He shore away, and that proud horsehair plume,
Never till now defiled, sank to the dust ;

And Rustum bow'd his head ; but then the
gloom

Grew blacker, thunder rumbled in the air,
And lightnings rent the cloud ; and Ruksh, the
horse,

Who stood at hand, utter'd a dreadful cry ;—

NARRATIVE POEMS

No horse's cry was that, most like the roar
Of some pain'd desert-lion, who all day
Hath trail'd the hunter's javelin in his side,
And comes at night to die upon the sand.
The two hosts heard that cry, and quaked for
fear,

And Oxus curdled as it cross'd his stream.
But Sohrab heard, and quail'd not, but rush'd on,
And struck again ; and again Rustum bow'd
His head ; but this time all the blade, like glass,
Sprang in a thousand shivers on the helm,
And in the hand the hilt remain'd alone.

Then Rustum raised his head ; his dreadful eyes
Glared, and he shook on high his menacing
spear,

And shouted : *Rustum!* — Sohrab heard that
shout,

And shrank amazed ; back he recoil'd one step,
And scann'd with blinking eyes the advancing
form ;

And then he stood bewilder'd ; and he dropp'd
His covering shield, and the spear pierced his
side.

He reel'd, and staggering back, sank to the
ground ;

And then the gloom dispersed, and the wind fell,
And the bright sun broke forth, and melted all
The cloud ; and the two armies saw the pair—
Saw Rustum standing, safe upon his feet,
And Sohrab, wounded, on the bloody sand.

Then, with a bitter smile, Rustum began :—

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

‘Sohrab, thou thoughtest in thy mind to kill
A Persian lord this day, and strip his corpse,
And bear thy trophies to Afrasiab’s tent.
Or else that the great Rustum would come down
Himself to fight, and that thy wiles would move
His heart to take a gift, and let thee go.
And then that all the Tartar host would praise
Thy courage or thy craft, and spread thy fame,
To glad thy father in his weak old age.
Fool, thou art slain, and by an unknown man !
Dearer to the red jackals shalt thou be
Than to thy friends, and to thy father old.’

And, with a fearless mien, Sohrab replied :—
‘Unknown thou art ; yet thy fierce vaunt is
vain.

Thou dost not slay me, proud and boastful man !
No ! Rustum slays me, and this filial heart.
For were I match’d with ten such men as thee,
And I were that which till to-day I was,
They should be lying here, I standing there.
But that belovéd name unnerved my arm—
That name, and something, I confess, in thee,
Which troubles all my heart, and made my
shield

Fall ; and thy spear transfix’d an unarm’d foe.
And now thou boastest, and insult’st my fate.
But hear thou this, fierce man, tremble to hear :
The mighty Rustum shall avenge my death !
My father, whom I seek through all the world,
He shall avenge my death, and punish thee !’

As when some hunter in the spring hath found

NARRATIVE POEMS

A breeding eagle sitting on her nest,
Upon the craggy isle of a hill-lake,
And pierced her with an arrow as she rose,
And follow'd her to find her where she fell
Far off ;—anon her mate comes winging back
From hunting, and a great way off descries
His huddling young left sole ; at that, he checks
His pinion, and with short uneasy sweeps
Circles above his eyry, with loud screams
Chiding his mate back to her nest ; but she
Lies dying, with the arrow in her side,
In some far stony gorge out of his ken,
A heap of fluttering feathers—never more
Shall the lake glass her, flying over it ;
Never the black and dripping precipices
Echo her stormy scream as she sails by—
As that poor bird flies home, nor knows his loss,
So Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood
Over his dying son, and knew him not.

But, with a cold, incredulous voice, he said :—
' What prate is this of fathers and revenge ?
The mighty Rustum never had a son.'

And, with a failing voice, Sohrab replied :—
' Ah yes, he had ! and that lost son am I.
Surely the news will one day reach his ear,
Reach Rustum, where he sits, and tarries long,
Somewhere, I know not where, but far from
here ;
And pierce him like a stab, and make him leap
To arms, and cry for vengeance upon thee.
Fierce man, bethink thee, for an only son !

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

What will that grief, what will that vengeance
be ?

Oh, could I live, till I that grief had seen !
Yet him I pity not so much, but her,
My mother, who in Ader-baijan dwells
With that old king, her father, who grows grey
With age, and rules over the valiant Koords.
Her most I pity, who no more will see
Sohrab returning from the Tartar camp,
With spoils and honour, when the war is done.
But a dark rumour will be bruited up,
From tribe to tribe, until it reach her ear ;
And then will that defenceless woman learn
That Sohrab will rejoice her sight no more,
But that in battle with a nameless foe,
By the far-distant Oxus, he is slain.'

He spoke ; and as he ceased, he wept aloud,
Thinking of her he left, and his own death.
He spoke ; but Rustum listen'd, plunged in
thought.

Nor did he yet believe it was his son
Who spoke, although he call'd back names he
knew ;

For he had had sure tidings that the babe,
Which was in Ader-baijan born to him,
Had been a puny girl, no boy at all—
So that sad mother sent him word, for fear
Rustum should seek the boy, to train in arms.
And so he deem'd that either Sohrab took,
By a false boast, the style of Rustum's son ;
Or that men gave it him, to swell his fame.

NARRATIVE POEMS

So deem'd he ; yet he listen'd, plunged in
thought :

And his soul set to grief, as the vast tide
Of the bright rocking Ocean sets to shore
At the full moon ; tears gather'd in his eyes ;
For he remember'd his own early youth,
And all its bounding rapture ; as, at dawn,
The shepherd from his mountain-lodge descries
A far, bright city, smitten by the sun,
Through many rolling clouds—so Rustum saw
His youth ; saw Sohrab's mother, in her bloom ;
And that old king, her father, who loved well
His wandering guest, and gave him his fair child
With joy ; and all the pleasant life they led,
They three, in that long-distant summer-time—
The castle, and the dewy woods, and hunt
And hound, and morn on those delightful hills
In Ader-baijan. And he saw that Youth,
Of age and looks to be his own dear son,
Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand,
Like some rich hyacinth which by the scythe
Of an unskilful gardener has been cut,
Mowing the garden grass-plots near its bed,
And lies, a fragrant tower of purple bloom,
On the mown, dying grass—so Sohrab lay,
Lovely in death, upon the common sand.
And Rustum gazed on him with grief, and
said :—

‘ O Sohrab, thou indeed art such a son
Whom Rustum, wert thou his, might well have
loved !

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

Yet here thou errest, Sohrab, or else men
Have told thee false—thou art not Rustum's son.
For Rustum had no son ; one child he had—
But one—a girl ; who with her mother now
Plies some light female task, nor dreams of us—
Of us she dreams not, nor of wounds, nor war.'

But Sohrab answer'd him in wrath : for now
The anguish of the deep-fix'd spear grew fierce,
And he desired to draw forth the steel,
And let the blood flow free, and so to die—
But first he would convince his stubborn foe ;
And, rising sternly on one arm, he said :—

‘ Man, who art thou who dost deny my
words ?

Truth sits upon the lips of dying men,
And falsehood, while I lived, was far from mine.
I tell thee, prick'd upon this arm I bear
That seal which Rustum to my mother gave,
That she might prick it on the babe she bore.'

He spoke ; and all the blood left Rustum's
cheeks,

And his knees totter'd, and he smote his hand
Against his breast, his heavy mailed hand,
That the hard iron corslet clank'd aloud ;
And to his heart he press'd the other hand,
And in a hollow voice he spake, and said :—

‘ Sohrab, that were a proof which could not
lie !

If thou show this, then art thou Rustum's son.'

Then, with weak hasty fingers, Sohrab loosed
His belt, and near the shoulder bared his arm,

NARRATIVE POEMS

And show'd a sign in faint vermilion points
Prick'd ; as a cunning workman, in Peking,
Pricks with vermilion some clear porcelain vase,
An emperor's gift—at early morn he paints,
And all day long, and, when night comes, the
lamp

Lights up his studious forehead and thin hands—
So delicately prick'd the sign appear'd
On Sohrab's arm, the sign of Rustum's seal.
It was that griffin, which of old rear'd Zal,
Rustum's great father, whom they left to die,
A helpless babe, among the mountain-rocks ;
Him that kind creature found, and rear'd, and
loved—

Then Rustum took it for his glorious sign.
And Sohrab bared that image on his arm,
And himself scann'd it long with mournful eyes,
And then he touch'd it with his hand and said :—

‘How say'st thou ? Is that sign the proper
sign

Of Rustum's son, or of some other man's ?’

He spoke ; but Rustum gazed, and gazed, and
stood

Speechless ; and then he utter'd one sharp cry :
O boy—thy father !—and his voice choked there.
And then a dark cloud pass'd before his eyes,
And his head swam, and he sank down to earth.
But Sohrab crawl'd to where he lay, and cast
His arms about his neck, and kiss'd his lips,
And with fond faltering fingers stroked his
cheeks,

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

Trying to call him back to life ; and life
Came back to Rustum, and he oped his eyes,
And they stood wide with horror ; and he seized
In both his hands the dust which lay around,
And threw it on his head, and smirch'd his
hair,—

His hair, and face, and beard, and glittering arms ;
And strong convulsive groanings shook his breast,
And his sobs choked him ; and he clutch'd his
sword,

To draw it, and for ever let life out.

But Sohrab saw his thought, and held his hands,
And with a soothing voice he spake, and said :—

‘ Father, forbear ! for I but meet to-day
The doom which at my birth was written down
In Heaven, and thou art Heaven’s unconscious
hand.

Surely my heart cried out that it was thou,
When first I saw thee ; and thy heart spoke too,
I know it ! but fate trod those promptings down
Under its iron heel ; fate, fate engaged
The strife, and hurl’d me on my father’s spear.
But let us speak no more of this ! I find
My father ; let me feel that I have found !
Come, sit beside me on this sand, and take
My head betwixt thy hands, and kiss my cheeks,
And wash them with thy tears, and say : *My*
son !

Quick ! quick ! for number’d are my sands of
life,

And swift ; for like the lightning to this field

NARRATIVE POEMS

I came, and like the wind I go away—
Sudden, and swift, and like a passing wind.
But it was writ in Heaven that this should be.'

So said he, and his voice released the heart
Of Rustum, and his tears broke forth ; he cast
His arms round his son's neck, and wept aloud,
And kiss'd him. And awe fell on both the hosts,
When they saw Rustum's grief ; and Ruksh, the
horse,

With his head bowing to the ground and mane
Sweeping the dust, came near, and in mute woe
First to the one then to the other moved
His head, as if enquiring what their grief
Might mean ; and from his dark, compassionate
eyes,

The big warm tears roll'd down, and caked the
sand.

But Rustum chid him with stern voice, and
said :—

'Ruksh, now thou grievest ; but, O Ruksh,
thy feet

Should first have rotted on their nimble joints,
Or ere they brought thy master to this field !'

But Sohrab look'd upon the horse and said ;—
'Is this, then, Ruksh ? How often, in past days,
My mother told me of thee, thou brave steed,
My terrible father's terrible horse ! and said,
That I should one day find thy lord and thee.
Come, let me lay my hand upon thy mane !
O Ruksh, thou art more fortunate than I ;
For thou hast gone where I shall never go,

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

And snuff'd the breezes of my father's home.
And thou hast trod the sands of Seistan,
And seen the River of Helmund, and the Lake
Of Zirrah ; and the aged Zal himself
Has often stroked thy neck, and given thee food,
Corn in a golden platter soak'd with wine,
And said ; *O Ruksh ! bear Rustum well !*—but I
Have never known my grandsire's furrow'd face,
Nor seen his lofty house in Seistan,
Nor slaked my thirst at the clear Helmund
stream ;

But lodged among my father's foes, and seen
Afrasiab's cities only, Samarcand,
Bokhara, and lone Khiva in the waste,
And the black Toorkmun tents ; and only drunk
The desert rivers, Moorghab and Tejend,
Kohik, and where the Kalmuks feed their sheep,
The northern Sir ; and this great Oxus stream,
The yellow Oxus, by whose brink I die.'

Then, with a heavy groan, Rustum bewail'd :—
' Oh, that its waves were flowing over me !
Oh, that I saw its grains of yellow silt
Roll tumbling in the current o'er my head !'

But, with a grave mild voice, Sohrab replied :—
' Desire not that, my father ! thou must live.
For some are born to do great deeds, and live,
As some are born to be obscured, and die.
Do thou the deeds I die too young to do,
And reap a second glory in thine age ;
Thou art my father, and thy gain is mine.
But come ! thou seest this great host of men

NARRATIVE POEMS

Which follow me ; I pray thee, slay not these !
Let me entreat for them ; what have they done ?
They follow'd me, my hope, my fame, my star.
Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace.
But me thou must bear hence, not send with
 them,

But carry me with thee to Seistan,
And place me on a bed, and mourn for me,
Thou, and the snow-hair'd Zal, and all thy
 friends.

And thou must lay me in that lovely earth,
And heap a stately mound above my bones,
And plant a far-seen pillar over all.

That so the passing horseman on the waste
May see my tomb a great way off, and cry :
Sohrab, the mighty Rustum's son, lies there,
Whom his great father did in ignorance kill !
And I be not forgotten in my grave.'

And, with a mournful voice, Rustum replied :—
' Fear not ! as thou hast said, Sohrab, my son,
So shall it be ; for I will burn my tents,
And quit the host, and bear thee hence with me,
And carry thee away to Seistan,
And place thee on a bed, and mourn for thee,
With the snow-headed Zal, and all my friends.
And I will lay thee in that lovely earth,
And heap a stately mound above thy bones,
And plant a far-seen pillar over all,
And men shall not forget thee in thy grave.
And I will spare thy host ; yea, let them go !
Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace !

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

What should I do with slaying any more ?
For would that all whom I have ever slain
Might be once more alive ; my bitterest foes,
And they who were call'd champions in their
time,
And through whose death I won that fame I
have—

And I were nothing but a common man,
A poor, mean soldier, and without renown,
So thou mightest live too, my son, my son !
Or rather would that I, even I myself,
Might now be lying on this bloody sand,
Near death, and by an ignorant stroke of thine,
Not thou of mine ! and I might die, not thou ;
And I, not thou, be borne to Seistan ;
And Zal might weep above my grave, not thine ;
And say : *O son, I weep thee not too sore,
For willingly, I know, thou met'st thine end !*
But now in blood and battles was my youth,
And full of blood and battles is my age,
And I shall never end this life of blood.'

Then, at the point of death, Sohrab replied :—
' A life of blood indeed, thou dreadful man !
But thou shalt yet have peace ; only not now,
Not yet ! but thou shalt have it on that day,
When thou shalt sail in a high-masted ship,
Thou and the other peers of Kai Khosroo,
Returning home over the salt blue sea,
From laying thy dear master in his grave.'

And Rustum gazed in Sohrab's face, and
said :—

NARRATIVE POEMS

‘ Soon be that day, my son, and deep that sea !
Till then, if fate so wills, let me endure.’

He spoke ; and Sohrab smiled on him, and took
The spear, and drew it from his side, and eased
His wound’s imperious anguish ; but the blood
Came welling from the open gash, and life
Flow’d with the stream ;—all down his cold
white side

The crimson torrent ran, dim now and soil’d,
Like the soil’d tissue of white violets
Left, freshly gather’d, on their native bank,
By children whom their nurses call with haste
Indoors from the sun’s eye ; his head droop’d low,
His limbs grew slack ; motionless, white, he lay—
White, with eyes closed ; only when heavy gasps,
Deep heavy gasps quivering through all his frame,
Convulsed him back to life, he open’d them,
And fix’d them feebly on his father’s face ;
Till now all strength was ebb’d, and from his
limbs

Unwillingly the spirit fled away,
Regretting the warm mansion which it left,
And youth, and bloom, and this delightful world.

So, on the bloody sand, Sohrab lay dead ;
And the great Rustum drew his horseman’s cloak
Down o’er his face, and sate by his dead son.
As those black granite pillars, once high-rear’d
By Jemshid in Persepolis, to bear
His house, now ’mid their broken flights of steps
Lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side—
So in the sand lay Rustum by his son.

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

And night came down over the solemn waste,
And the two gazing hosts, and that sole pair,
And darken'd all ; and a cold fog, with night,
Crept from the Oxus. Soon a hum arose,
As of a great assembly loosed, and fires
Began to twinkle through the fog ; for now
Both armies moved to camp, and took their meal ;
The Persians took it on the open sands
Southward, the Tartars by the river marge ;
And Rustum and his son were left alone.

But the majestic river floated on,
Out of the mist and hum of that low land,
Into the frosty starlight, and there moved,
Rejoicing, through the hush'd Chorasman waste,
Under the solitary moon ;—he flow'd
Right for the polar star, past Orgunjè,
Brimming, and bright, and large ; then sands begin
To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,
And split his currents ; that for many a league
The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strains along
Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles—
Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had
In his high mountain-cradle in Pamere,
A foil'd circuitous wanderer—till at last
The long'd-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
His luminous home of waters opens, bright
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed
stars
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

THE SICK KING IN BOKHARA

Hussein

O MOST just Vizier, send away
The cloth-merchants, and let them be,
Them and their dues, this day ! the King
Is ill at ease, and calls for thee.

The Vizier

O merchants, tarry yet a day
Here in Bokhara ! but at noon,
To-morrow, come, and ye shall pay
Each fortieth web of cloth to me,
As the law is, and go your way.

O Hussein, lead me to the King !
Thou teller of sweet tales, thine own,
Ferdousi's, and the others', lead !
How is it with my lord ?

Hussein

Alone,
Ever since prayer-time, he doth wait,

THE SICK KING IN BOKHARA

O Vizier ! without lying down,
In the great window of the gate,
Looking into the Registràn,
Where through the sellers' booths the slaves
Are this way bringing the dead man.—
O Vizier, here is the King's door !

The King

O Vizier, I may bury him ?

The Vizier

O King, thou know'st, I have been sick
These many days, and heard no thing
(For Allah shut my ears and mind),
Not even what thou dost, O King !
Wherefore, that I may counsel thee,
Let Hussein, if thou wilt, make haste
To speak in order what hath chanced.

The King

O Vizier, be it as thou say'st !

Hussein

Three days since, at the time of prayer,
A certain Moollah, with his robe
All rent, and dust upon his hair,

NARRATIVE POEMS

Watch'd my lord's coming forth, and push'd
The golden mace-bearers aside,
And fell at the King's feet, and cried :

‘Justice, O King, and on myself !
On this great sinner, who did break
The law, and by the law must die !
Vengeance, O King !’

But the King spake :
‘What fool is this, that hurts our ears
With folly ? or what drunken slave ?
My guards, what, prick him with your spears !
Prick me the fellow from the path !’
As the King said, so it was done,
And to the mosque my lord pass'd on.

But on the morrow, when the King
Went forth again, the holy book
Carried before him, as is right,
And through the square his way he took ;
My man comes running, fleck'd with blood
From yesterday, and falling down
Cries out most earnestly : ‘O King,
My lord, O King, do right, I pray !’

‘How canst thou, ere thou hear, discern
If I speak folly ? but a king,
Whether a thing be great or small,
Like Allah, hears and judges all.

THE SICK KING IN BOKHARA

‘Wherefore hear thou! Thou know’st, how fierce
In these last days the sun hath burn’d ;
That the green water in the tanks
Is to a putrid puddle turn’d ;
And the canal, which from the stream
Of Samarcand is brought this way,
Wastes, and runs thinner every day.

‘Now I at nightfall had gone forth
Alone, and in a darksome place
Under some mulberry-trees I found
A little pool ; and in short space,
With all the water that was there
I fill’d my pitcher, and stole home
Unseen ; and having drink to spare,
I hid the can behind the door,
And went up on the roof to sleep.

‘But in the night, which was with wind
And burning dust, again I creep
Down, having fever, for a drink.

‘Now meanwhile had my brethren found
The water-pitcher, where it stood
Behind the door upon the ground,
And call’d my mother ; and they all,
As they were thirsty, and the night
Most sultry, drain’d the pitcher there ;
That they sate with it, in my sight,
Their lips still wet, when I came down.

NARRATIVE POEMS

‘ Now mark ! I, being fever’d, sick
(Most unblest also), at that sight
Brake forth, and cursed them — dost thou
hear?—
One was my mother——Now, do right !’

But my lord mused a space, and said :
‘ Send him away, Sirs, and make on !
It is some madman !’ the King said.
As the King bade, so was it done.

The morrow, at the self-same hour,
In the King’s path, behold, the man,
Not kneeling, sternly fix’d ! he stood
Right opposite, and thus began,
Frowning grim down : ‘ Thou wicked King,
Most deaf where thou shouldst most give ear !
What, must I howl in the next world,
Because thou wilt not listen here ?

‘ What, wilt thou pray, and get thee grace,
And all grace shall to me be grudged ?
Nay but, I swear, from this thy path
I will not stir till I be judged !’

Then they who stood about the King
Drew close together and conferr’d ;
Till that the King stood forth and said :
‘ Before the priests thou shalt be heard.’

THE SICK KING IN BOKHARA

But when the Ulemas were met,
And the thing heard, they doubted not ;
But sentenced him, as the law is,
To die by stoning on the spot.

Now the King charged us secretly :
' Stoned must he be, the law stands so.
Yet, if he seek to fly, give way ;
Hinder him not, but let him go.'

So saying, the King took a stone,
And cast it softly ;—but the man,
With a great joy upon his face,
Kneel'd down, and cried not, neither ran.

So they, whose lot it was, cast stones,
That they flew thick and bruised him sore.
But he praised Allah with loud voice,
And remain'd kneeling as before.

My lord had cover'd up his face ;
But when one told him, ' He is dead,'
Turning him quickly to go in,
' Bring thou to me his corpse,' he said.

And truly, while I speak, O King,
I hear the bearers on the stair ;
Wilt thou they straightway bring him in ?
—Ho ! enter ye who tarry there !

NARRATIVE POEMS

The Vizier

O King, in this I praise thee not !
Now must I call thy grief not wise.
Is he thy friend, or of thy blood,
To find such favour in thine eyes ?

Nay, were he thine own mother's son,
Still, thou art king, and the law stands.
It were not meet the balance swerved,
The sword were broken in thy hands.

But being nothing, as he is,
Why for no cause make sad thy face ?—
Lo, I am old ! three kings, ere thee,
Have I seen reigning in this place.

But who, through all this length of time,
Could bear the burden of his years,
If he for strangers pain'd his heart
Not less than those who merit tears ?

Fathers we *must* have, wife and child,
And grievous is the grief for these ;
This pain alone, which *must* be borne,
Makes the head white, and bows the knees.

But other loads than this his own
One man is not well made to bear.
Besides, to each are his own friends,
To mourn with him, and show him care.

THE SICK KING IN BOKHARA

Look, this is but one single place,
Though it be great ; all the earth round,
If a man bear to have it so,
Things which might vex him shall be found.

Upon the Russian frontier, where
The watchers of two armies stand
Near one another, many a man,
Seeking a prey unto his hand,

Hath snatch'd a little fair-hair'd slave ;
They snatch also, towards Mervè,
The Shiah dogs, who pasture sheep,
And up from thence to Orgunjè.

And these all, labouring for a lord,
Eat not the fruit of their own hands ;
Which is the heaviest of all plagues,
To that man's mind, who understands.

The kaffirs also (whom God curse !)
Vex one another, night and day ;
There are the lepers, and all sick ;
There are the poor, who faint away.

All these have sorrow, and keep still,
Whilst other men make cheer, and sing.
Wilt thou have pity on all these ?
No, nor on this dead dog, O King !

NARRATIVE POEMS

The King

O Vizier, thou art old, I young !
Clear in these things I cannot see.
My head is burning, and a heat
Is in my skin which angers me.

But hear ye this, ye sons of men !
They that bear rule, and are obey'd,
Unto a rule more strong than theirs
Are in their turn obedient made.

In vain therefore, with wistful eyes
Gazing up hither, the poor man,
Who loiters by the high-heap'd booths,
Below there, in the Registàn,

Says : ' Happy he, who lodges there !
With silken raiment, store of rice,
And for this drought, all kinds of fruits,
Grape-syrup, squares of colour'd ice,

' With cherries serv'd in drifts of snow.'
In vain hath a king power to build
Houses, arcades, enamell'd mosques ;
And to make orchard-closes, fill'd

With curious fruit-trees brought from far ;
With cisterns for the winter-rain,
And, in the desert, spacious inns
In divers places—if that pain

THE SICK KING IN BOKHARA

Is not more lighten'd, which he feels,
If his will be not satisfied ;
And that it be not, from all time
The law is planted, to abide.

Thou wast a sinner, thou poor man !
Thou wast athirst ; and didst not see,
That, though we take what we desire,
We must not snatch it eagerly.

And I have meat and drink at will,
And rooms of treasures, not a few.
But I am sick, nor heed I these ;
And what I would, I cannot do.

Even the great honour which I have,
When I am dead, will soon grow still ;
So have I neither joy, nor fame.
But what I can do, that I will.

I have a fretted brick-work tomb
Upon a hill on the right hand,
Hard by a close of apricots,
Upon the road of Samarcand ;

Thither, O Vizier, will I bear
This man my pity could not save,
And, plucking up the marble flags,
There lay his body in my grave.

ENNA NARRATIVE POEMS 1117

Bring water, nard, and linen rolls !
Wash off all blood, set smooth each limb !
Then say : ' He was not wholly vile,
Because a king shall bury him.'

BALDER DEAD'

I. SENDING

So on the floor lay Balder dead ; and round
Lay thickly strewn swords, axes, darts, and spears,
Which all the Gods in sport had idly thrown
At Balder, whom no weapon pierced or clove ;
But in his breast stood fixt the fatal bough
Of mistletoe, which Lok the Accuser gave
To Hoder, and unwitting Hoder threw—
'Gainst that alone had Balder's life no charm.

And all the Gods and all the Heroes came,
And stood round Balder on the bloody floor,
Weeping and wailing ; and Valhalla rang
Up to its golden roof with sobs and cries ;
And on the tables stood the untasted meats,
And in the horns and gold-rimm'd skulls the
wine.

And now would night have fall'n, and found
them yet

Wailing ; but otherwise was Odin's will.
And thus the father of the ages spake :—

'Enough of tears, ye Gods, enough of wail !
Not to lament in was Valhalla made.

NARRATIVE POEMS

If any here might weep for Balder's death,
I most might weep, his father ; such a son
I lose to-day, so bright, so loved a God.
But he has met that doom, which long ago
The Nornies, when his mother bare him,
 spun,

And fate set seal, that so his end must be.
Balder has met his death, and ye survive—
Weep him an hour, but what can grief avail ?
For ye yourselves, ye Gods, shall meet your
 doom.

All ye who hear me, and inhabit Heaven,
And I too, Odin too, the Lord of all.
But ours we shall not meet, when that day
 comes,
With women's tears and weak complaining
 cries—

Why should we meet another's portion so ?
Rather it fits you, having wept your hour,
With cold dry eyes, and hearts composed and
 stern,

To live, as erst, your daily life in Heaven.
By me shall vengeance on the murderer Lok,
The foe, the accuser, whom, though Gods, we
 hate,

Be strictly cared for, in the appointed day.
Meanwhile, to-morrow, when the morning
 dawns,

Bring wood to the seashore to Balder's ship,
And on the deck build high a funeral-pile,
And on the top lay Balder's corpse, and put

BALDER DEAD

Fire to the wood, and send him out to sea
To burn ; for that is what the dead desire.'

So spake the King of Gods, and straightway
rose,

And mounted his horse Sleipner, whom he rode ;
And from the hall of Heaven he rode away
To Lidskialf, and sate upon his throne,
The mount, from whence his eye surveys the
world.

And far from Heaven he turn'd his shining orbs
To look on Midgard, and the earth, and men.
And on the conjuring Lapps he bent his gaze
Whom antler'd reindeer pull over the snow ;
And on the Finns, the gentlest of mankind,
Fair men, who live in holes under the ground ;
Nor did he look once more to Ida's plain,
Nor tow'rd Valhalla, and the sorrowing Gods ;
For well he knew the Gods would heed his
word,

And cease to mourn, and think of Balder's pyre.

But in Valhalla all the Gods went back
From around Balder, all the Heroes went ;
And left his body stretch'd upon the floor.
And on their golden chairs they sate again,
Beside the tables, in the hall of Heaven ;
And before each the cooks who served them
placed

New messes of the boar Serimner's flesh,
And the Valkyries crown'd their horns with
mead.

So they, with pent-up hearts and tearless eyes,

NARRATIVE POEMS

Wailing no more, in silence ate and drank,
While twilight fell, and sacred night came on.

But the blind Hoder left the feasting Gods
In Odin's hall, and went through Asgard streets,
And past the haven where the Gods have moor'd
Their ships, and through the gate, beyond the
wall ;

Though sightless, yet his own mind led the God.
~~Down to the margin of the roaring sea~~

He came, and sadly went along the sand,
Between the waves and black o'erhanging cliffs
Where in and out the screaming seafowl fly ;
Until he came to where a gully breaks
Through the cliff-wall, and a fresh stream runs
down

From the high moors behind, and meets the sea.
There, in the glen, Fensaler stands, the house
Of Frea, honour'd mother of the Gods,
And shows its lighted windows to the main.
There he went up, and pass'd the open doors ;
And in the hall he found those women old,
The prophetesses, who by rite eterne
On Frea's hearth feed high the sacred fire
Both night and day ; and by the inner wall
Upon her golden chair the Mother sate,
With folded hands, revolving things to come.
To her drew Hoder near, and spake, and said :—

‘ Mother, a child of bale thou bar'st in me !
For, first, thou barest me with blinded eyes,
Sightless and helpless, wandering weak in
Heaven ;

BALDER DEAD

And, after that, of ignorant witless mind
Thou barest me, and unforeseeing soul ;
That I alone must take the branch from Lok,
The foe, the accuser, whom, though Gods, we
hate,

And cast it at the dear-loved Balder's breast
At whom the Gods in sport their weapons
threw—

'Gainst that alone had Balder's life no charm.
Now therefore what to attempt, or whither fly,
For who will bear my hateful sight in Heaven ?
Can I, O mother, bring them Balder back ?
Or — for thou know'st the fates, and things
allow'd—

Can I with Hela's power a compact strike,
And make exchange, and give my life for his ?'

He spoke: the mother of the Gods replied:—
'Hoder, ill-fated, child of bale, my son,
Sightless in soul and eye, what words are these ?
That one, long portion'd with his doom of death,
Should change his lot, and fill another's life,
And Hela yield to this, and let him go !
On Balder Death hath laid her hand, not thee ;
Nor doth she count this life a price for that.
For many Gods in Heaven, not thou alone,
Would freely die to purchase Balder back,
And wend themselves to Hela's gloomy realm.
For not so gladsome is that life in Heaven
Which Gods and heroes lead, in feast and fray,
Waiting the darkness of the final times,
That one should grudge its loss for Balder's sake,

NARRATIVE POEMS

Balder their joy, so bright, so loved a God.
But fate withstands, and laws forbid this way.
Yet in my secret mind one way I know,
Nor do I judge if it shall win or fail ;
But much must still be tried, which shall but
fail.'

And the blind Hoder answer'd her, and said:—
'What way is this, O mother, that thou show'st?
Is it a matter which a God might try?'

And straight the mother of the Gods replied:—
'There is a road which leads to Hela's realm,
Untrodden, lonely, far from light and Heaven.
Who goes that way must take no other horse
To ride, but Sleipner, Odin's horse, alone.
Nor must he choose that common path of Gods
Which every day they come and go in Heaven,
O'er the bridge Bifrost, where is Heimdall's
watch,

Past Midgard fortress, down to earth and men.
But he must tread a dark untravell'd road
Which branches from the north of Heaven, and
ride

Nine days, nine nights, toward the northern ice,
Through valleys deep-engulph'd, with roaring
streams.

And he will reach on the tenth morn a bridge
Which spans with golden arches Giall's stream,
Not Bifrost, but that bridge a damsel keeps,
Who tells the passing troops of dead their way
To the low shore of ghosts, and Hela's realm.
And she will bid him northward steer his course.

BALDER DEAD

Then he will journey through no lighted land,
Nor see the sun arise, nor see it set ;
But he must ever watch the northern Bear,
Who from her frozen height with jealous eye
Confronts the Dog and Hunter in the south,
And is alone not dipt in Ocean's stream.
And straight he will come down to Ocean's
strand—

Ocean, whose watery ring enfolds the world,
And on whose marge the ancient giants dwell.
But he will reach its unknown northern shore,
Far, far beyond the outmost giant's home,
At the chink'd fields of ice, the waste of snow.
And he must fare across the dismal ice
Northward, until he meets a stretching wall
Barring his way, and in the wall a grate.
But then he must dismount, and on the ice
Tighten the girths of Sleipner, Odin's horse,
And make him leap the grate, and come within.
And he will see stretch round him Hela's
realm,

The plains of Nifheim, where dwell the dead,
And hear the roaring of the streams of Hell.
And he will see the feeble, shadowy tribes,
And Balder sitting crown'd, and Hela's throne.

Then must he not regard the wailful ghosts
Who all will flit, like eddyng leaves, around ;
But he must straight accost their solemn queen,
And pay her homage, and entreat with prayers,
Telling her all that grief they have in Heaven
For Balder, whom she holds by right below ;

NARRATIVE POEMS

If haply he may melt her heart with words,
And make her yield, and give him Balder back.'

She spoke ; but Hoder answer'd her and
said :—

' Mother, a dreadful way is this thou show'st ;
No journey for a sightless God to go !'

And straight the mother of the Gods replied :—
' Therefore thyself thou shalt not go, my son.
But he whom first thou meetest when thou
com'st

To Asgard, and declar'st this hidden way,
Shall go ; and I will be his guide unseen.'

She spoke, and on her face let fall her veil,
And bow'd her head, and sate with folded hands,
But at the central hearth those women old,
Who while the Mother spake had ceased their
toil,

Began again to heap the sacred fire.

And Hoder turn'd, and left his mother's house,
Fensaler, whose lit windows look to sea ;

And came again down to the roaring waves,

And back along the beach to Asgard went,

Pondering on that which Frea said should be.

But night came down, and darken'd Asgard
streets.

Then from their loathéd feast the Gods arose,

And lighted torches, and took up the corpse

Of Balder from the floor of Odin's hall,

And laid it on a bier, and bare him home

Through the fast-darkening streets to his own
house,

BALDER DEAD

Breidablik, on whose columns Balder graved
The enchantments that recall the dead to life.
For wise he was, and many curious arts,
Postures of runes, and healing herbs he knew ;
Unhappy ! but that art he did not know,
To keep his own life safe, and see the sun.
There to his hall the Gods brought Balder home,
And each bespake him as he laid him down :—

‘ Would that ourselves, O Balder, we were
borne

Home to our halls, with torchlight, by our kin,
So thou might'st live, and still delight the Gods ! ’

They spake ; and each went home to his own
house.

But there was one, the first of all the Gods
For speed, and Hermod was his name in Heaven ;
Most fleet he was, but now he went the last,
Heavy in heart for Balder, to his house,
Which he in Asgard built him, there to dwell,
Against the harbour, by the city-wall.

Him the blind Hoder met, as he came up
From the sea cityward, and knew his step ;
Nor yet could Hermod see his brother's face,
For it grew dark ; but Hoder touch'd his arm.

And as a spray of honeysuckle flowers
Brushes across a tired traveller's face
Who shuffles through the deep dew-moisten'd
dust,

On a May evening, in the darken'd lanes,
And starts him, that he thinks a ghost went by—
So Hoder brush'd by Hermod's side, and said :—

NARRATIVE POEMS

‘Take Sleipner, Hermod, and set forth with
dawn
To Hela’s kingdom, to ask Balder back ;
And they shall be thy guides, who have the
power.’

He spake, and brush’d soft by, and disappear’d.
And Hermod gazed into the night, and said :—

‘Who is it utters through the dark his hest
So quickly, and will wait for no reply ?
The voice was like the unhappy Hoder’s voice.
Howbeit I will see, and do his hest ;
For there rang note divine in that command.’

So speaking, the fleet-footed Hermod came
Home, and lay down to sleep in his own house ;
And all the Gods lay down in their own homes.
And Hoder too came home, distraught with
grief,

Loathing to meet, at dawn, the other Gods ;
And he went in, and shut the door, and fixt
His sword upright, and fell on it, and died.

But from the hill of Lidskialf Odin rose,
The throne, from which his eye surveys the
world ;

And mounted Sleipner, and in darkness rode
To Asgard. And the stars came out in heaven,
High over Asgard, to light home the King.
But fiercely Odin gallop’d, moved in heart ;
And swift to Asgard, to the gate, he came.
And terribly the hoofs of Sleipner rang
Along the flinty floor of Asgard streets,
And the Gods trembled on their golden beds

BALDER DEAD

Hearing the wrathful Father coming home—
For dread, for like a whirlwind, Odin came.
And to Valhalla's gate he rode, and left
Sleipner ; and Sleipner went to his own stall ;
And in Valhalla Odin laid him down.

But in Breidablik, Nanna, Balder's wife,
Came with the Goddesses who wrought her will,
And stood by Balder lying on his bier.

And at his head and feet she station'd Scalds
Who in their lives were famous for their song ;
These o'er the corpse intoned a plaintive strain,
A dirge—and Nanna and her train replied.

And far into the night they wail'd their dirge.
But when their souls were satisfied with wail,
They went, and laid them down, and Nanna
went

Into an upper chamber, and lay down ;
And Frea seal'd her tired lids with sleep.

And 'twas when night is bordering hard on
dawn,

When air is chilliest, and the stars sunk low ;
Then Balder's spirit through the gloom drew
near,

In garb, in form, in feature as he was,
Alive ; and still the rays were round his head
Which were his glorious mark in Heaven ; he
stood

Over against the curtain of the bed,
And gazed on Nanna as she slept, and spake :—
' Poor lamb, thou sleepest, and forgett'st thy
woe !

NARRATIVE POEMS

Tears stand upon the lashes of thine eyes,
Tears wet the pillow by thy cheek ; but thou,
Like a young child, hast cried thyself to sleep.
Sleep on ; I watch thee, and am here to aid.
Alive I kept not far from thee, dear soul !
Neither do I neglect thee now, though dead.
For with to-morrow's dawn the Gods prepare
To gather wood, and build a funeral-pile
Upon my ship, and burn my corpse with fire,
That sad, sole honour of the dead ; and thee
They think to burn, and all my choicest wealth,
With me, for thus ordains the common rite.
But it shall not be so ; but mild, but swift,
But painless shall a stroke from Frea come,
To cut thy thread of life, and free thy soul,
And they shall burn thy corpse with mine, not
thee.

And well I know that by no stroke of death,
Tardy or swift, wouldst thou be loath to die,
So it restored thee, Nanna, to my side,
Whom thou so well hast loved ; but I can
smooth

Thy way, and this, at least, my prayers avail.
Yes, and I fain would altogether ward
Death from thy head, and with the Gods in
Heaven

Prolong thy life, though not by thee desired—
But right bars this, not only thy desire.
Yet dreary, Nanna, is the life they lead
In that dim world, in Hela's mouldering realm ;
And doleful are the ghosts, the troops of dead,

BALDER DEAD

Whom Hela with austere control presides.
For of the race of Gods is no one there,
Save me alone, and Hela, solemn queen ;
And all the nobler souls of mortal men
On battle-field have met their death, and now
Feast in Valhalla, in my father's hall ;
Only the inglorious sort are there below,
The old, the cowards, and the weak are there—
Men spent by sickness, or obscure decay.
But even there, O Nanna, we might find
Some solace in each other's look and speech,
Wandering together through that gloomy world,
And talking of the life we led in Heaven,
While we yet lived, among the other Gods.'

He spake, and straight his lineaments began
To fade ; and Nanna in her sleep stretch'd out
Her arms towards him with a cry—but he
Mournfully shook his head, and disappear'd.
And as the woodman sees a little smoke
Hang in the air, afield, and disappear,
So Balder faded in the night away.
And Nanna on her bed sank back ; but then
Frea, the mother of the Gods, with stroke
Painless and swift, set free her airy soul,
Which took, on Balder's track, the way below ;
And instantly the sacred morn appear'd.

NARRATIVE POEMS

2. JOURNEY TO THE DEAD

FORTH from the east, up the ascent of Heaven,
Day drove his courser with the shining mane ;
And in Valhalla, from his gable-perch,
The golden-crested cock began to crow.
Hereafter, in the blackest dead of night,
With shrill and dismal cries that bird shall crow,
Warning the Gods that foes draw nigh to
 Heaven ;

But now he crew at dawn, a cheerful note,
To wake the Gods and Heroes to their tasks.
And all the Gods, and all the Heroes, woke.
And from their beds the Heroes rose, and donn'd
Their arms, and led their horses from the stall,
And mounted them, and in Valhalla's court
Were ranged ; and then the daily fray began.
And all day long they there are hack'd and hewn,
'Mid dust, and groans, and limbs lopp'd off, and
 blood ;

But all at night return to Odin's hall,
Woundless and fresh ; such lot is theirs in
 Heaven.

And the Valkyries on their steeds went forth
Tow'rd earth and fights of men ; and at their side

BALDER DEAD

Skulda, the youngest of the Nornies, rode ;
And over Bifrost, where is Heimdall's watch,
Past Midgard fortress, down to earth they came ;
There through some battle-field, where men fall
fast,

Their horses fetlock-deep in blood, they ride,
And pick the bravest warriors out for death,
Whom they bring back with them at night to
Heaven,

To glad the Gods, and feast in Odin's hall.

But the Gods went not now, as otherwhile,
Into the tilt-yard, where the Heroes fought,
To feast their eyes with looking on the fray ;
Nor did they to their judgment-place repair
By the ash Igdrasil, in Ida's plain,
Where they hold council, and give laws for men.
But they went, Odin first, the rest behind,
To the hall Gladheim, which is built of gold ;
Where are in circle ranged twelve golden chairs,
And in the midst one higher, Odin's throne.
There all the Gods in silence sate them down ;
And thus the Father of the ages spake :—

‘Go quickly, Gods, bring wood to the seashore,
With all, which it beseems the dead to have,
And make a funeral-pile on Balder's ship ;
On the twelfth day the Gods shall burn his corpse.
But Hermod, thou, take Sleipner, and ride down
To Hela's kingdom, to ask Balder back.’

So said he ; and the Gods arose, and took
Axes and ropes, and at their head came Thor,
Shouldering his hammer, which the giants know.

NARRATIVE POEMS

Forth wended they, and drave their steeds before.
And up the dewy mountain-tracks they fared
To the dark forests, in the early dawn ;
And up and down, and side and slant they roam'd.
And from the glens all day an echo came
Of crashing falls ; for with his hammer Thor
Smote 'mid the rocks the lichen-bearded pines,
And burst their roots, while to their tops the
 Gods

Made fast the woven ropes, and haled them down,
And lopp'd their boughs, and clove them on the
 sword,

And bound the logs behind their steeds to draw,
And drave them homeward ; and the snorting
 steeds

Went straining through the crackling brushwood
 down,

And by the darkling forest-paths the Gods
Follow'd, and on their shoulders carried boughs.
And they came out upon the plain, and pass'd
Asgard, and led their horses to the beach,
And loosed them of their loads on the seashore,
And ranged the wood in stacks by Balder's ship ;
And every God went home to his own house.

But when the Gods were to the forest gone,
Hermod led Sleipner from Valhalla forth
And saddled him ; before that, Sleipner brook'd
No meaner hand than Odin's on his mane,
On his broad back no lesser rider bore ;
Yet docile now he stood at Hermod's side,
Arching his neck, and glad to be bestrode,

BALDER DEAD

Knowing the God they went to seek, how dear.
But Hermod mounted him, and sadly fared
In silence up the dark untravell'd road
Which branches from the north of Heaven, and
went

All day ; and daylight waned, and night came on.
And all that night he rode, and journey'd so,
Nine days, nine nights, toward the northern ice,
Through valleys deep-engulph'd, by roaring
streams.

And on the tenth morn he beheld the bridge
Which spans with golden arches Giall's stream,
And on the bridge a damsel watching arm'd,
In the strait passage, at the farther end,
Where the road issues between walling rocks.
Scant space that warder left for passers by ;—
But as when cowherds in October drive
Their kine across a snowy mountain-pass
To winter-pasture on the southern side,
And on the ridge a waggon chokes the way,
Wedged in the snow ; then painfully the hinds
With goad and shouting urge their cattle past,
Plunging through deep untrodden banks of snow
To right and left, and warm steam fills the air—
So on the bridge that damsel block'd the way,
And question'd Hermod as he came, and said :—
' Who art thou on thy black and fiery horse
Under whose hoofs the bridge o'er Giall's stream
Rumbles and shakes ? Tell me thy race and
home.

But yestermorn, five troops of dead pass'd by,

NARRATIVE POEMS

Bound on their way below to Hela's realm,
Nor shook the bridge so much as thou alone.
And thou hast flesh and colour on thy cheeks,
Like men who live, and draw the vital air ;
Nor look'st thou pale and wan, like men deceased,
Souls bound below, my daily passers here.'

And the fleet-footed Hermod answer'd her :—
' O damsel, Hermod am I call'd, the son
Of Odin ; and my high-roof'd house is built
Far hence, in Asgard, in the city of Gods ;
And Sleipner, Odin's horse, is this I ride.
And I come, sent this road on Balder's track ;
Say then, if he hath cross'd thy bridge or no ?'

He spake ; the warder of the bridge replied :—
' O Hermod, rarely do the feet of Gods
Or of the horses of the Gods resound
Upon my bridge ; and, when they cross, I know.
Balder hath gone this way, and ta'en the road
Below there, to the north, tow'rd Hela's realm.
From here the cold white mist can be discern'd,
Nor lit with sun, but through the darksome air
By the dim vapour-blotted light of stars,
Which hangs over the ice where lies the road.
For in that ice are lost those northern streams,
Freezing and ridging in their onward flow,
Which from the fountain of Vergelmer run,
The spring that bubbles up by Hela's throne.
There are the joyless seats, the haunt of ghosts,
Hela's pale swarms ; and there was Balder bound.
Ride on ! pass free ! but he by this is there.'

She spake, and stepp'd aside, and left him room,

BALDER DEAD

And Hermod greeted her, and gallop'd by
Across the bridge ; then she took post again.
But northward Hermod rode, the way below ;
And o'er a darksome tract, which knows no sun,
But by the blotted light of stars, he fared.
And he came down to Ocean's northern strand,
At the drear ice, beyond the giants' home.
Thence on he journey'd o'er the fields of ice
Still north, until he met a stretching wall
Barring his way, and in the wall a grate.
Then he dismounted, and drew tight the girths,
On the smooth ice, of Sleipner, Odin's horse,
And made him leap the grate, and came within.
And he beheld spread round him Hela's realm,
The plains of Nifheim, where dwell the dead,
And heard the thunder of the streams of Hell.
For near the wall the river of Roaring flows,
Outmost ; the others near the centre run—
The Storm, the Abyss, the Howling, and the
Pain ;
These flow by Hela's throne, and near their
spring.
And from the dark flock'd up the shadowy
tribes ;—
And as the swallows crowd the bulrush-beds
Of some clear river, issuing from a lake,
On autumn-days, before they cross the sea ;
And to each bulrush-crest a swallow hangs
Quivering, and others skim the river-streams,
And their quick twittering fills the banks and
shores—

NARRATIVE POEMS

So around Hermod swarm'd the twittering ghosts.
Women, and infants, and young men who died
Too soon for fame, with white ungraven shields ;
And old men, known to glory, but their star
Betray'd them, and of wasting age they died,
Not wounds ; yet, dying, they their armour wore,
And now have chief regard in Hela's realm.
Behind flock'd wrangling up a piteous crew,
Greeted of none, disfeatured and forlorn—
Cowards, who were in sloughs interr'd alive ;
And round them still the wattled hurdles hung,
Wherewith they stamp'd them down, and trod
 them deep,

To hide their shameful memory from men.
But all he pass'd unhail'd, and reach'd the throne
Of Hela, and saw, near it, Balder crown'd,
And Hela set thereon, with countenance stern ;
And thus bespake him first the solemn queen :—

‘ Unhappy, how hast thou endured to leave
The light, and journey to the cheerless land
Where idly flit about the feeble shades ?
How didst thou cross the bridge o'er Giall's
 stream,

Being alive, and come to Ocean's shore ?
Or how o'erleap the grate that bars the wall ? ’

She spake : but down off Sleipner Hermod
 sprang,

And fell before her feet, and clasp'd her knees ;
And spake, and mild entreated her, and said :—

‘ O Hela, wherefore should the Gods declare
Their errands to each other, or the ways

BALDER DEAD

They go ? the errand and the way is known.
Thou know'st, thou know'st, what grief we have
in Heaven

For Balder, whom thou hold'st by right below.
Restore him ! for what part fulfils he here ?
Shall he shed cheer over the cheerless seats,
And touch the apathetic ghosts with joy ?
Not for such end, O queen, thou hold'st thy
realm.

For Heaven was Balder born, the city of Gods
And Heroes, where they live in light and joy.
Thither restore him, for his place is there !'

He spoke ; and grave replied the solemn
queen :—

' Hermod, for he thou art, thou son of Heaven !
A strange unlikely errand, sure, is thine.
Do the Gods send to me to make them blest ?
Small bliss my race hath of the Gods obtain'd.
Three mighty children to my father Lok
Did Angerbode, the giantess, bring forth—
Fenris the wolf, the Serpent huge, and me.
Of these the Serpent in the sea ye cast,
Who since in your despite hath wax'd amain,
And now with gleaming ring enfolds the
world ;

Me on this cheerless nether world ye threw,
And gave me nine unlighted realms to rule ;
While on his island in the lake afar,
Made fast to the bored crag, by wile not strength
Subdued, with limber chains lives Fenris bound.
Lok still subsists in Heaven, our father wise,

NARRATIVE POEMS

Your mate, though loathed, and feasts in Odin's
hall ;

But him too foes await, and netted snares,
And in a cave a bed of needle-rocks,
And o'er his visage serpents dropping gall.
Yet he shall one day rise, and burst his bonds,
And with himself set us his offspring free,
When he guides Muspel's children to their
bourne.

Till then in peril or in pain we live,
Wrought by the Gods—and ask the Gods our
aid ?

Howbeit, we abide our day ; till then,
We do not as some feebler haters do—
Seek to afflict our foes with petty pangs,
Helpless to better us, or ruin them.
Come then ! if Balder was so dear beloved,
And this is true, and such a loss is Heaven's—
Hear, how to Heaven may Balder be restored.
Show me through all the world the signs of grief!
Fails but one thing to grieve, here Balder stops !
Let all that lives and moves upon the earth
Weep him, and all that is without life weep ;
Let Gods, men, brutes, bewEEP him ; plants and
stones !

So shall I know the lost was dear indeed,
And bend my heart, and give him back to
Heaven.'

She spake ; and Hermod answer'd her, and
said :—

' Hela, such as thou say'st, the terms shall be.

BALDER DEAD

But come, declare me this, and truly tell :
May I, ere I depart, bid Balder hail,
Or is it here withheld to greet the dead ?'

He spake, and straightway Hela answered
him :—

' Hermod, greet Balder if thou wilt, and hold
Converse ; his speech remains, though he be
dead.'

And straight to Balder Hermod turn'd, and
spake :—

' Even in the abode of death, O Balder, hail !
Thou hear'st, if hearing, like as speech, is thine,
The terms of thy releasement hence to Heaven ;
Fear nothing but that all shall be fulfill'd.
For not unmindful of thee are the Gods,
Who see the light, and blest in Asgard dwell ;
Even here they seek thee out, in Hela's realm.
And sure of all the happiest far art thou
Who ever have been known in earth or Heaven ;
Alive, thou wast of Gods the most beloved,
And now thou sittest crown'd by Hela's side,
Here, and hast honour among all the dead.'

He spake ; and Balder utter'd him reply,
But feebly, as a voice far off ; he said :—

' Hermod the nimble, gild me not my death !
Better to live a serf, a captured man,
Who scatters rushes in a master's hall,
Than be a crown'd king here, and rule the dead.
And now I count not of these terms as safe
To be fulfill'd, nor my return as sure,
Though I be loved, and many mourn my death ;

NARRATIVE POEMS

For double-minded ever was the seed
Of Lok, and double are the gifts they give.
Howbeit, report thy message ; and therewith,
To Odin, to my father, take this ring,
Memorial of me, whether saved or no ;
And tell the Heaven-born Gods how thou hast
seen

Me sitting here below by Hela's side,
Crown'd, having honour among all the dead.'

He spake, and raised his hand, and gave the
ring.

And with inscrutable regard the queen
Of Hell beheld them, and the ghosts stood dumb.
But Hermod took the ring, and yet once more
Kneel'd and did homage to the solemn queen ;
Then mounted Sleipner, and set forth to ride
Back, through the astonish'd tribes of dead, to
Heaven.

And to the wall he came, and found the grate
Lifted, and issued on the fields of ice.

And o'er the ice he fared to Ocean's strand,
And up from thence, a wet and misty road,
To the arm'd damsel's bridge, and Giall's stream.
Worse was that way to go than to return,
For him ;—for others all return is barr'd.

Nine days he took to go, two to return,
And on the twelfth morn saw the light of
Heaven.

And as a traveller in the early dawn
To the steep edge of some great valley comes,
Through which a river flows, and sees, beneath,

BALDER DEAD

Clouds of white rolling vapours fill the vale,
But o'er them, on the farther slope, descries
Vineyards, and crofts, and pastures, bright with
sun—

So Hermod, o'er the fog between, saw Heaven.
And Sleipner snorted, for he smelt the air
Of Heaven ; and mightily, as wing'd, he flew.
And Hermod saw the towers of Asgard rise ;
And he drew near, and heard no living voice
In Asgard ; and the golden halls were dumb.
Then Hermod knew what labour held the Gods ;
And through the empty streets he rode, and
pass'd

Under the gate-house to the sands, and found
The Gods on the sea-shore by Balder's ship.

NARRATIVE POEMS

3. FUNERAL

THE Gods held talk together, group'd in knots,
Round Balder's corpse, which they had thither
borne ;

And Hermod came down tow'rds them from the
gate.

And Lok, the father of the serpent, first
Beheld him come, and to his neighbour spake :—

‘ See, here is Hermod, who comes single back
From Hell ; and shall I tell thee how he seems ?
Like as a farmer, who hath lost his dog,
Some morn, at market, in a crowded town—
Through many streets the poor beast runs in
vain,

And follows this man after that, for hours ;
And, late at evening, spent and panting, falls
Before a stranger's threshold, not his home,
With flanks a-tremble, and his slender tongue
Hangs quivering out between his dust-smear'd
jaws,

And piteously he eyes the passers by ;
But home his master comes to his own farm,
Far in the country, wondering where he is—
So Hermod comes to-day unfollow'd home.’

BALDER DEAD

And straight his neighbour, moved with wrath,
replied :—

‘ Deceiver ! fair in form, but false in heart !
Enemy, mocker, whom, though Gods, we hate—
Peace, lest our father Odin hear thee gibe !
Would I might see him snatch thee in his hand,
And bind thy carcase, like a bale, with cords,
And hurl thee in a lake, to sink or swim !
If clear from plotting Balder’s death, to swim ;
But deep, if thou devisedst it, to drown,
And perish, against fate, before thy day.’

So they two soft to one another spake.
But Odin look’d toward the land, and saw
His messenger ; and he stood forth, and cried.
And Hermod came, and leapt from Sleipner
down,

And in his father’s hand put Sleipner’s rein,
And greeted Odin and the Gods, and said :—

‘ Odin, my father, and ye, Gods of Heaven !
Lo, home, having perform’d your will, I come.
Into the joyless kingdom have I been,
Below, and look’d upon the shadowy tribes
Of ghosts, and communed with their solemn
queen ;

And to your prayer she sends you this reply :
*Show her through all the world the signs of grief !
Fails but one thing to grieve, there Balder stops !
Let Gods, men, brutes, bewEEP him ; plants and
stones :*

*So shall she know your loss was dear indeed,
And bend her heart, and give you Balder back.*

NARRATIVE POEMS

He spoke ; and all the Gods to Odin look'd ;
And straight the Father of the ages said :—

‘Ye Gods, these terms may keep another day.
But now, put on your arms, and mount your
steeds,

And in procession all come near, and weep
Balder ; for that is what the dead desire.

When ye enough have wept, then build a pile
Of the heap'd wood, and burn his corpse with
fire

Out of our sight ; that we may turn from grief,
And lead, as erst, our daily life in Heaven.’

He spoke, and the Gods arm'd ; and Odin
donn'd

His dazzling corslet and his helm of gold,
And led the way on Sleipner ; and the rest
Follow'd, in tears, their father and their king.
And thrice in arms around the dead they rode,
Weeping ; the sands were wetted, and their arms,
With their thick-falling tears—so good a friend
They mourn'd that day, so bright, so loved a
God.

And Odin came, and laid his kingly hands
On Balder's breast, and thus began the wail :—

‘Farewell, O Balder, bright and loved, my
son !

In that great day, the twilight of the Gods,
When Muspel's children shall beleaguer Heaven,
Then we shall miss thy counsel and thy arm.’

Thou camest near the next, O warrior Thor !
Shouldering thy hammer, in thy chariot drawn,

BALDER DEAD

Swaying the long-hair'd goats with silver'd rein ;
And over Balder's corpse these words didst say :—

‘ Brother, thou dwellest in the darksome land,
And talkest with the feeble tribes of ghosts,
Now, and I know not how they prize thee
there—

But here, I know, thou wilt be miss'd and
mourn'd.

For haughty spirits and high wraths are rife
Among the Gods and Heroes here in Heaven,
As among those whose joy and work is war ;
And daily strifes arise, and angry words.

But from thy lips, O Balder, night or day,
Heard no one ever an injurious word

To God or Hero, but thou keptest back

The others, labouring to compose their brawls.

Be ye then kind, as Balder too was kind !

For we lose him, who smoothed all strife in
Heaven.’

He spake, and all the Gods assenting wail'd.

And Freya next came nigh, with golden tears ;

The loveliest Goddess she in Heaven, by all

Most honour'd after Freya, Odin's wife.

Her long ago the wandering Oder took

To mate, but left her to roam distant lands ;

Since then she seeks him, and weeps tears of gold.

Names hath she many ; Vanadis on earth

They call her, Freya is her name in Heaven ;

She in her hands took Balder's head, and spake :—

‘ Balder, my brother, thou art gone a road
Unknown and long, and haply on that way

NARRATIVE POEMS

My long-lost wandering Oder thou hast met,
For in the paths of Heaven he is not found.
Oh, if it be so, tell him what thou wast
To his neglected wife, and what he is,
And wring his heart with shame, to hear thy
word !

For he, my husband, left me here to pine,
Not long a wife, when his unquiet heart
First drove him from me into distant lands ;
Since then I vainly seek him through the
world,

And weep from shore to shore my golden tears,
But neither god nor mortal heeds my pain.

Thou only, Balder, wast for ever kind,
To take my hand, and wipe my tears, and say :

Weep not, O Freya, weep no golden tears !

One day the wandering Oder will return,

Or thou wilt find him in thy faithful search

On some great road, or resting in an inn,

Or at a ford, or sleeping by a tree.

So Balder said ;—but Oder, well I know,

My truant Oder I shall see no more

To the world's end ; and Balder now is gone,

And I am left uncomforted in Heaven.'

She spake ; and all the Goddesses bewail'd.

Last from among the Heroes one came near,

No God, but of the hero-troop the chief—

Regner, who swept the northern sea with fleets,

And ruled o'er Denmark and the heathy isles,

Living ; but Ella captured him and slew ;—

A king whose fame then fill'd the vast of Heaven,

BALDER DEAD

Now time obscures it, and men's later deeds.
He last approach'd the corpse, and spake, and
said :—

‘ Balder, there yet are many Scalds in Heaven
Still left, and that chief Scald, thy brother Brage,
Whom we may bid to sing, though thou art
gone.

And all these gladly, while we drink, we hear,
After the feast is done, in Odin's hall ;
But they harp ever on one string, and wake
Remembrance in our soul of wars alone,
Such as on earth we valiantly have waged,
And blood, and ringing blows, and violent death.
But when thou sangest, Balder, thou didst strike
Another note, and, like a bird in spring,
Thy voice of joyance minded us, and youth,
And wife, and children, and our ancient home.
Yes, and I, too, remember'd then no more
My dungeon, where the serpents stung me dead,
Nor Ella's victory on the English coast—
But I heard Thora laugh in Gothland Isle,
And saw my shepherdess, Aslauga, tend
Her flock along the white Norwegian beach.
Tears started to mine eyes with yearning joy.
Therefore with grateful heart I mourn thee dead.’

So Regner spake, and all the Heroes groan'd.
But now the sun had pass'd the height of Heaven,
And soon had all that day been spent in wail ;
But then the Father of the ages said :—

‘ Ye Gods, there well may be too much of
wail !

NARRATIVE POEMS

Bring now the gather'd wood to Balder's ship ;
Heap on the deck the logs, and build the pyre.'

But when the Gods and Heroes heard, they
brought

The wood to Balder's ship, and built a pile,
Full the deck's breadth, and lofty ; then the corpse
Of Balder on the highest top they laid,
With Nanna on his right, and on his left
Hoder, his brother, whom his own hand slew.
And they set jars of wine and oil to lean
Against the bodies, and stuck torches near,
Splinters of pine-wood, soak'd with turpentine ;
And brought his arms and gold, and all his stuff,
And slew the dogs who at his table fed,
And his horse, Balder's horse, whom most he
loved,

And placed them on the pyre, and Odin threw
A last choice gift thereon, his golden ring.
The mast they fixt, and hoisted up the sails,
Then they put fire to the wood ; and Thor
Set his stout shoulder hard against the stern
To push the ship through the thick sand ;—
sparks flew

From the deep trench she plough'd, so strong a
God

Furrow'd it ; and the water gurgled in.
And the ship floated on the waves, and rock'd.
But in the hills a strong east-wind arose,
And came down moaning to the sea ; first squalls
Ran black o'er the sea's face, then steady rush'd
The breeze, and fill'd the sails, and blew the fire.

BALDER DEAD

And wreathed in smoke the ship stood out to
sea.

Soon with a roaring rose the mighty fire,
And the pile crackled ; and between the logs
Sharp quivering tongues of flame shot out, and
leapt,

Curling and darting, higher, until they lick'd
The summit of the pile, the dead, the mast,
And ate the shrivelling sails ; but still the ship
Drove on, ablaze above her hull with fire.

And the Gods stood upon the beach, and gazed.
And while they gazed, the sun went lurid
down

Into the smoke-wrapt sea, and night came on.
Then the wind fell, with night, and there was
calm ;

But through the dark they watch'd the burning
ship

Still carried o'er the distant waters on,
Farther and farther, like an eye of fire.
And long, in the far dark, blazed Balder's pile ;
But fainter, as the stars rose high, it flared,
The bodies were consumed, ash choked the pile.
And as, in a decaying winter-fire,
A charr'd log, falling, makes a shower of sparks—
So with a shower of sparks the pile fell in,
Reddening the sea around ; and all was dark.

But the Gods went by starlight up the shore
To Asgard, and sate down in Odin's hall
At table, and the funeral-feast began.
All night they ate the boar Serimner's flesh,

NARRATIVE POEMS

And from their horns, with silver rimm'd, drank
mead,

Silent, and waited for the sacred morn.

And morning over all the world was spread.
Then from their loathéd feast the Gods arose,
And took their horses, and set forth to ride
O'er the bridge Bifrost, where is Heimdall's
watch,

To the ash Igdrasil, and Ida's plain ;
Thor came on foot, the rest on horseback rode.
And they found Mimir sitting by his fount
Of wisdom, which beneath the ashtree springs ;
And saw the Nornies watering the roots
Of that world-shadowing tree with honey-dew.
There came the Gods, and sate them down on
stones ;

And thus the Father of the ages said :—

‘ Ye Gods, the terms ye know, which Hermod
brought.

Accept them or reject them ! both have grounds.
Accept them, and they bind us, unfulfill'd,
To leave for ever Balder in the grave,
An unrecover'd prisoner, shade with shades.
But how, ye say, should the fulfilment fail ?—
Smooth sound the terms, and light to be fulfill'd ;
For dear-beloved was Balder while he lived
In Heaven and earth, and who would grudge
him tears ?

But from the traitorous seed of Lok they come,
These terms, and I suspect some hidden fraud.
Bethink ye, Gods, is there no other way ?—

BALDER DEAD

Speak, were not this a way, the way for Gods ?
If I, if Odin, clad in radiant arms,
Mounted on Sleipner, with the warrior Thor
Drawn in his car beside me, and my sons,
All the strong brood of Heaven, to swell my train,
Should make irruption into Hela's realm,
And set the fields of gloom ablaze with light,
And bring in triumph Balder back to Heaven ?'

He spake, and his fierce sons applauded loud.
But Frea, mother of the Gods, arose,
Daughter and wife of Odin ; thus she said :—

'Odin, thou whirlwind, what a threat is this !
Thou threatenest what transcends thy might,
even thine.

For of all powers the mightiest far art thou,
Lord over men on earth, and Gods in Heaven ;
Yet even from thee thyself hath been withheld
One thing—to undo what thou thyself hast ruled.
For all which hath been fixt, was fixt by thee.
In the beginning, ere the Gods were born,
Before the Heavens were builded, thou didst slay
The giant Ymir, whom the abyss brought forth,
Thou and thy brethren fierce, the sons of Bor,
And cast his trunk to choke the abysmal void.
But of his flesh and members thou didst build
The earth and Ocean, and above them Heaven.
And from the flaming world, where Muspel
reigns,
Thou sent'st and fetched'st fire, and madest lights,
Sun, moon, and stars, which thou hast hung in
Heaven,

NARRATIVE POEMS

Dividing clear the paths of night and day.
And Asgard thou didst build, and Midgard fort ;
Then me thou mad'st ; of us the Gods were born.
Last, walking by the sea, thou foundest spars
Of wood, and framed'st men, who till the earth,
Or on the sea, the field of pirates, sail.
And all the race of Ymir thou didst drown,
Save one, Bergelmer ;—he on shipboard fled
Thy deluge, and from him the giants sprang.
But all that brood thou hast removed far off,
And set by Ocean's utmost marge to dwell ;
But Hela into Niflheim thou threw'st,
And gav'st her nine unlighted worlds to rule,
A queen, and empire over all the dead.
That empire wilt thou now invade, light up
Her darkness, from her grasp a subject tear ?—
Try it ; but I, for one, will not applaud.
Nor do I merit, Odin, thou should'st slight
Me and my words, though thou be first in
Heaven ;

For I too am a Goddess, born of thee,
Thine eldest, and of me the Gods are sprung ;
And all that is to come I know, but lock
In mine own breast, and have to none reveal'd.
Come then ! since Hela holds by right her prey,
But offers terms for his release to Heaven,
Accept the chance ; thou canst no more obtain.
Send through the world thy messengers ; entreat
All living and unliving things to weep
For Balder ; if thou haply thus may'st melt
Hela, and win the loved one back to Heaven.'

BALDER DEAD

She spake, and on her face let fall her veil,
And bow'd her head, and sate with folded hands.
Nor did the all-ruling Odin slight her word ;
Straightway he spake, and thus address'd the
Gods :

‘ Go quickly forth through all the world, and
pray

All living and unliving things to weep
Balder, if haply he may thus be won.’

When the Gods heard, they straight arose, and
took

Their horses, and rode forth through all the
world ;

North, south, east, west, they struck, and roam'd
the world,

Entreating all things to weep Balder's death.

And all that lived, and all without life, wept.

And as in winter, when the frost breaks up,

At winter's end, before the spring begins,

And a warm west-wind blows, and thaw sets in—

After an hour a dripping sound is heard

In all the forests, and the soft-strewn snow

Under the trees is dibbled thick with holes,

And from the boughs the snowloads shuffle down ;

And, in fields sloping to the south, dark plots

Of grass peep out amid surrounding snow,

And widen, and the peasant's heart is glad—

So through the world was heard a dripping noise

Of all things weeping to bring Balder back ;

And there fell joy upon the Gods to hear.

But Hermod rode with Niord, whom he took

NARRATIVE POEMS

To show him spits and beaches of the sea
Far off, where some unwarn'd might fail to
weep—

Niord, the God of storms, whom fishers know ;
Not born in Heaven ; he was in Vanheim rear'd,
With men, but lives a hostage with the Gods ;
He knows each frith, and every rocky creek
Fringed with dark pines, and sands where seafowl
scream—

They two scour'd every coast, and all things wept.
And they rode home together, through the wood
Of Jarnvid, which to east of Midgard lies
Bordering the giants, where the trees are iron ;
There in the wood before a cave they came,
Where sate, in the cave's mouth, a skinny hag,
Toothless and old ; she gibes the passers by.
Thok is she call'd, but now Lok wore her shape ;
She greeted them the first, and laugh'd and
said :—

‘ Ye Gods, good lack, is it so dull in Heaven,
That ye come pleasuring to Thok's iron wood ?
Lovers of change ye are, fastidious sprites.
Look, as in some boor's yard a sweet-breath'd cow,
Whose manger is stuff'd full of good fresh hay,
Snuffs at it daintily, and stoops her head
To chew the straw, her litter, at her feet—
So ye grow squeamish, Gods, and sniff at Heaven !’

She spake ; but Hermod answer'd her and
said :—

‘ Thok, not for gibes we come, we come for tears.
Balder is dead, and Hela holds her prey,

BALDER DEAD

But will restore, if all things give him tears.
Begrudge not thine ! to all was Balder dear.'

Then, with a louder laugh, the hag replied :—
' Is Balder dead ? and do ye come for tears ?
Thok with dry eyes will weep o'er Balder's pyre.
Weep him all other things, if weep they will—
I weep him not ! let Hela keep her prey.'

She spake, and to the cavern's depth she fled,
Mocking ; and Hermod knew their toil was vain.
And as seafaring men, who long have wrought
In the great deep for gain, at last come home,
And towards evening see the headlands rise
Of their dear country, and can plain descry
A fire of wither'd furze which boys have lit
Upon the cliffs, or smoke of burning weeds
Out of a till'd field inland ;—then the wind
Catches them, and drives out again to sea ;
And they go long days tossing up and down
Over the grey sea-ridges, and the glimpse
Of port they had makes bitterer far their toil—
So the Gods' cross was bitterer for their joy.

Then, sad at heart, to Niord Hermod spake :—
' It is the accuser Lok, who flouts us all !
Ride back, and tell in Heaven this heavy news ;
I must again below, to Hela's realm.'

He spoke ; and Niord set forth back to Heaven.
But northward Hermod rode, the way below,
The way he knew ; and traversed Giall's stream,
And down to Ocean groped, and cross'd the ice,
And came beneath the wall, and found the grate
Still lifted ; well was his return foreknown.

NARRATIVE POEMS

And once more Hermod saw around him spread
The joyless plains, and heard the streams of Hell.
But as he enter'd, on the extremest bound
Of Niffheim, he saw one ghost come near,
Hovering, and stopping oft, as if afraid—
Hoder, the unhappy, whom his own hand slew.
And Hermod look'd, and knew his brother's
ghost,

And call'd him by his name, and sternly said :—

‘Hoder, ill-fated, blind in heart and eyes !
Why tarriest thou to plunge thee in the gulph
Of the deep inner gloom, but flittest here,
In twilight, on the lonely verge of Hell,
Far from the other ghosts, and Hela's throne ?
Doubtless thou fearest to meet Balder's voice,
Thy brother, whom through folly thou didst slay.’

He spoke ; but Hoder answer'd him, and
said :—

‘ Hermod the nimble, dost thou still pursue
The unhappy with reproach, even in the grave ?
For this I died, and fled beneath the gloom,
Not daily to endure abhorring Gods,
Nor with a hateful presence cumber Heaven ;
And canst thou not, even here, pass pitying by ?
No less than Balder have I lost the light
Of Heaven, and communion with my kin ;
I too had once a wife, and once a child,
And substance, and a golden house in Heaven—
But all I left of my own act, and fled
Below, and dost thou hate me even here ?
Balder upbraids me not, nor hates at all,

BALDER DEAD

Though he has cause, have any cause ; but he,
When that with downcast looks I hither came,
Stretch'd forth his hand, and with benignant
voice,

*Welcome, he said, if there be welcome here,
Brother and fellow-sport of Lok with me !*

And not to offend thee, Hermod, nor to force
My hated converse on thee, came I up
From the deep gloom, where I will now return ;
But earnestly I long'd to hover near,
Not too far off, when that thou camest by ;
To feel the presence of a brother God,
And hear the passage of a horse of Heaven,
For the last time—for here thou com'st no more.'

He spake, and turn'd to go to the inner gloom.
But Hermod stay'd him with mild words, and
said :—

'Thou doest well to chide me, Hoder blind !
Truly thou say'st, the planning guilty mind
Was Lok's ; the unwitting hand alone was thine.
But Gods are like the sons of men in this—
When they have woe, they blame the nearest
cause.

Howbeit stay, and be appeas'd ! and tell :
Sits Balder still in pomp by Hela's side,
Or is he mingled with the unnumber'd dead ?'

And the blind Hoder answer'd him and
spake :—

'His place of state remains by Hela's side,
But empty ; for his wife, for Nanna came
Lately below, and join'd him ; and the pair

NARRATIVE POEMS

Frequent the still recesses of the realm
Of Hela, and hold converse undisturb'd.
But they too, doubtless, will have breathed the
balm,

Which floats before a visitant from Heaven,
And have drawn upward to this verge of Hell.'

He spake ; and, as he ceased, a puff of wind
Roll'd heavily the leaden mist aside
Round where they stood, and they beheld two
forms
Make toward them o'er the stretching cloudy
plain.

And Hermod straight perceived them, who they
were,

Balder and Nanna ; and to Balder said :—

' Balder, too truly thou foresaw'st a snare !
Lok triumphs still, and Hela keeps her prey.
No more to Asgard shalt thou come, nor lodge
In thy own house, Breidablik, nor enjoy
The love all bear toward thee, nor train up
Forset, thy son, to be beloved like thee.
Here must thou lie, and wait an endless age.
Therefore for the last time, O Balder, hail !'

He spake ; and Balder answer'd him, and
said :—

' Hail and farewell ! for here thou com'st no
more.

Yet mourn not for me, Hermod, when thou sitt'st
In Heaven, nor let the other Gods lament,
As wholly to be pitied, quite forlorn.
For Nanna hath rejoin'd me, who, of old,

BALDER DEAD

In Heaven, was seldom parted from my side ;
And still the acceptance follows me, which
crown'd

My former life, and cheers me even here.
The iron frown of Hela is relax'd
When I draw nigh, and the wan tribes of dead
Love me, and gladly bring for my award
Their ineffectual feuds and feeble hates—
Shadows of hates, but they distress them still.'

And the fleet-footed Hermod made reply :—
'Thou hast then all the solace death allows,
Esteem and function ; and so far is well.
Yet here thou liest, Balder, underground,
Rusting for ever ; and the years roll on,
The generations pass, the ages grow,
And bring us nearer to the final day
When from the south shall march the fiery band
And cross the bridge of Heaven, with Lok for
guide,

And Fenris at his heel with broken chain ;
While from the east the giant Rymer steers
His ship, and the great serpent makes to land ;
And all are marshall'd in one flaming square
Against the Gods, upon the plains of Heaven,
I mourn thee, that thou canst not help us then.'

He spake ; but Balder answer'd him, and
said :—

'Mourn not for me ! Mourn, Hermod, for the
Gods ;

Mourn for the men on earth, the Gods in Heaven,
Who live, and with their eyes shall see that day !

NARRATIVE POEMS

The day will come, when fall shall Asgard's
towers,

And Odin, and his sons, the seed of Heaven ;

But what were I, to save them in that hour ?

If strength might save them, could not Odin
save,

My father, and his pride, the warrior Thor,

Vidar the silent, the impetuous Tyr ?

I, what were I, when these can nought avail ?

Yet, doubtless, when the day of battle comes,

And the two hosts are marshall'd, and in Heaven

The golden-crested cock shall sound alarm,

And his black brother-bird from hence reply,

And bucklers clash, and spears begin to pour—

Longing will stir within my breast, though vain.

But not to me so grievous, as, I know,

To other Gods it were, is my enforced

Absence from fields where I could nothing aid ;

For I am long since weary of your storm

Of carnage, and find, Hermod, in your life

Something too much of war and broils, which
make

Life one perpetual fight, a bath of blood.

Mine eyes are dizzy with the arrowy hail ;

Mine ears are stunn'd with blows, and sick for
calm.

Inactive therefore let me lie, in gloom,

Unarm'd, inglorious ; I attend the course

Of ages, and my late return to light,

In times less alien to a spirit mild,

In new-recover'd seats, the happier day.'

BALDER DEAD

He spake ; and the fleet Hermod thus replied :—
' Brother, what seats are these, what happier day?
Tell me, that I may ponder it when gone.'

And the ray-crowned Balder answer'd him :—
' Far to the south, beyond the blue, there spreads
Another Heaven, the boundless—no one yet
Hath reach'd it ; there hereafter shall arise
The second Asgard, with another name.
Thither, when o'er this present earth and Heavens
The tempest of the latter days hath swept,
And they from sight have disappear'd, and sunk,
Shall a small remnant of the Gods repair ;
Hoder and I shall join them from the grave.
There re-assembling we shall see emerge
From the bright Ocean at our feet an earth
More fresh, more verdant than the last, with
fruits

Self-springing, and a seed of man preserved,
Who then shall live in peace, as now in war.
But we in Heaven shall find again with joy
The ruin'd palaces of Odin, seats
Familiar, halls where we have supp'd of old ;
Re-enter them with wonder, never fill
Our eyes with gazing, and rebuild with tears.
And we shall tread once more the well-known
plain

Of Ida, and among the grass shall find
The golden dice wherewith we play'd of yore ;
And that will bring to mind the former life
And pastime of the Gods, the wise discourse
Of Odin, the delights of other days.

NARRATIVE POEMS

O Hermod, pray that thou may'st join us then !
Such for the future is my hope ; meanwhile,
I rest the thrall of Hela, and endure
Death, and the gloom which round me even now
Thickens, and to its inner gulph recalls.
Farewell, for longer speech is not allow'd !'

He spoke, and waved farewell, and gave his
hand

To Nanna ; and she gave their brother blind
Her hand, in turn, for guidance ; and the three
Departed o'er the cloudy plain, and soon
Faded from sight into the interior gloom.
But Hermod stood beside his drooping horse,
Mute, gazing after them in tears ; and fain,
Fain had he follow'd their receding steps,
Though they to death were bound, and he to
Heaven,

Then ; but a power he could not break withheld.
And as a stork which idle boys have trapp'd,
And tied him in a yard, at autumn sees
Flocks of his kind pass flying o'er his head
To warmer lands, and coasts that keep the sun ;—
He strains to join their flight, and from his shed
Follows them with a long complaining cry—
So Hermod gazed, and yearn'd to join his kin.

At last he sigh'd, and set forth back to Heaven.

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT⁸

I

Tristram

Tristram

Is she not come? The messenger was sure.
Prop me upon the pillows once again—
Raise me, my page! this cannot long endure.
—Christ, what a night! how the sleet whips
the pane!
What lights will those out to the northward be?

The Page

The lanterns of the fishing-boats at sea.

Tristram

Soft—who is that, stands by the dying fire?

The Page

Iseult.

NARRATIVE POEMS

Tristram

Ah ! not the Iseult I desire.

* * * *

What Knight is this so weak and pale,
Though the locks are yet brown on his noble
head,

Propt on pillows in his bed,
Gazing seaward for the light
Of some ship that fights the gale
On this wild December night ?
Over the sick man's feet is spread
A dark green forest-dress ;
A gold harp leans against the bed,
Ruddy in the fire's light.
I know him by his harp of gold,
Famous in Arthur's court of old ;
I know him by his forest-dress—
The peerless hunter, harper, knight,
Tristram of Lyonesse.

What Lady is this, whose silk attire
Gleams so rich in the light of the fire ?
The ringlets on her shoulders lying
In their flitting lustre vying
With the clasp of burnish'd gold
Which her heavy robe doth hold.
Her looks are mild, her fingers slight
As the driven snow are white ;

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

But her cheeks are sunk and pale.
Is it that the bleak sea-gale
Beating from the Atlantic sea
On this coast of Brittany,
Nips too keenly the sweet flower?
Is it that a deep fatigue
Hath come on her, a chilly fear,
Passing all her youthful hour
Spinning with her maidens here,
Listlessly through the window-bars
Gazing seawards many a league,
From her lonely shore-built tower,
While the knights are at the wars?
Or, perhaps, has her young heart
Felt already some deeper smart,
Of those that in secret the heart-strings rive,
Leaving her sunk and pale, though fair?
Who is this snowdrop by the sea?—
I know her by her mildness rare,
Her snow-white hands, her golden hair;
I know her by her rich silk dress,
And her fragile loveliness—
The sweetest Christian soul alive,
Iseult of Brittany.

Iseult of Brittany?—but where
Is that other Iseult fair,
That proud, first Iseult, Cornwall's queen?
She, whom Tristram's ship of yore
From Ireland to Cornwall bore,
To Tyntagel, to the side

NARRATIVE POEMS

Of King Marc, to be his bride ?
She who, as they voyaged, quaff'd
With Tristram that spiced magic draught,
Which since then for ever rolls
Through their blood, and binds their souls,
Working love, but working teen ?—
There were two Iseults who did sway
Each her hour of Tristram's day ;
But one possess'd his waning time,
The other his resplendent prime.
Behold her here, the patient flower,
Who possess'd his darker hour !
Iseult of the Snow-White Hand
Watches pale by Tristram's bed.
She is here who had his gloom,
Where art thou who hadst his bloom ?
One such kiss as those of yore
Might thy dying knight restore !
Does the love-draught work no more ?
Art thou cold, or false, or dead,
Iseult of Ireland ?

* * * *

Loud howls the wind, sharp patters the rain,
And the knight sinks back on his pillows again.
He is weak with fever and pain,
And his spirit is not clear.
Hark ! he mutters in his sleep,
As he wanders far from here,
Changes place and time of year,

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

And his closéd eye doth sweep
O'er some fair unwintry sea,
Not this fierce Atlantic deep,
While he mutters brokenly :—

Tristram

The calm sea shines, loose hang the vessel's sails ;
Before us are the sweet green fields of Wales,
And overhead the cloudless sky of May.—
'*Ah, would I were in those green fields at play,
Not pent on ship-board this delicious day !
Tristram, I pray thee, of thy courtesy,
Reach me my golden phial stands by thee,
But pledge me in it first for courtesy.—*'
Ha ! dost thou start ? are thy lips blanch'd like
mine ?
Child, 'tis no true draught this, 'tis poison'd wine !
Iseult ! . . .

* * * *

Ah, sweet angels, let him dream !
Keep his eyelids ! let him seem
Not this fever-wasted wight
Thinn'd and paled before his time,
But the brilliant youthful knight
In the glory of his prime,
Sitting in the gilded barge,
At thy side, thou lovely charge,
Bending gaily o'er thy hand,
Iseult of Ireland !

NARRATIVE POEMS

And she too, that princess fair,
If her bloom be now less rare,
Let her have her youth again—
Let her be as she was then !
Let her have her proud dark eyes,
And her petulant quick replies—
Let her sweep her dazzling hand
With its gesture of command,
And shake back her raven hair
With the old imperious air !
As of old, so let her be,
That first Iseult, princess bright,
Chatting with her youthful knight
As he steers her o'er the sea,
Quitting at her father's will
The green isle where she was bred,
And her bower in Ireland,
For the surge-beat Cornish strand ;
Where the prince whom she must wed
Dwells on loud Tyntagel's hill,
High above the sounding sea.
And that potion rare her mother
Gave her, that her future lord,
Gave her, that King Marc and she
Might drink it on their marriage-day,
And for ever love each other—
Let her, as she sits on board,
Ah, sweet saints, unwittingly !
See it shine, and take it up,
And to Tristram laughing say :
' Sir Tristram, of thy courtesy,

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

Pledge me in my golden cup !
Let them drink it—let their hands
Tremble, and their cheeks be flame,
As they feel the fatal bands
Of a love they dare not name,
With a wild delicious pain,
Twine about their hearts again !
Let the early summer be
Once more round them, and the sea
Blue, and o'er its mirror kind
Let the breath of the May-wind,
Wandering through their drooping sails,
Die on the green fields of Wales !
Let a dream like this restore
What his eye must see no more !

Tristram

Chill blows the wind, the pleasaunce-walks are
drear—

Madcap, what jest was this, to meet me here ?
Were feet like those made for so wild a way ?

The southern winter-parlour, by my fay,
Had been the likeliest trysting-place to-day !

'*Tristram !—nay, nay—thou must not take my
hand !—*

*Tristram !—sweet love !—we are betray'd—out-
plann'd.*

Fly—save thyself—save me !—I dare not stay.—

One last kiss first !—'*'Tis vain—to horse—away !*'

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NARRATIVE POEMS

Ah ! sweet saints, his dream doth move
Faster surely than it should,
From the fever in his blood !
All the spring-time of his love
Is already gone and past,
And instead thereof is seen
Its winter, which endureth still—
Tyntagel on its surge-beat hill,
The pleasaunce-walks, the weeping queen,
The flying leaves, the straining blast,
And that long, wild kiss—their last.
And this rough December-night,
And his burning fever-pain,
Mingle with his hurrying dream,
Till they rule it, till he seem
The press'd fugitive again,
The love-desperate banish'd knight
With a fire in his brain
Flying o'er the stormy main.
—Whither does he wander now ?
Haply in his dreams the wind
Wafts him here, and lets him find
The lovely orphan child again
In her castle by the coast ;
The youngest, fairest chatelaine,
Whom this realm of France can boast,
Our snowdrop by the Atlantic sea,
Iseult of Brittany.
And—for through the haggard air,
The stain'd arms, the matted hair
Of that stranger-knight ill-starr'd,

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

There gleam'd something, which recall'd
The Tristram who in better days
Was Launcelot's guest at Joyous Gard—
Welcomed here, and here install'd,
Tended of his fever here,
Haply he seems again to move
His young guardian's heart with love ;
In his exiled loneliness,
In his stately, deep distress,
Without a word, without a tear.
—Ah ! 'tis well he should retrace
His tranquil life in this lone place ;
His gentle bearing at the side
Of his timid youthful bride ;
His long rambles by the shore
On winter-evenings, when the roar
Of the near waves came, sadly grand,
Through the dark, up the drown'd sand,
Or his endless reveries
In the woods, where the gleams play
On the grass under the trees,
Passing the long summer's day
Idle as a mossy stone
In the forest-depths alone,
The chase neglected, and his hound
Couch'd beside him on the ground.
—Ah ! what trouble's on his brow ?
Hither let him wander now ;
Hither, to the quiet hours
Pass'd among these heaths of ours
By the grey Atlantic sea ;

NARRATIVE POEMS

Hours, if not of ecstasy,
From violent anguish surely free !

Tristram

All red with blood the whirling river flows,
The wide plain rings, the dazed air throbs with
blows.

Upon us are the chivalry of Rome—
Their spears are down, their steeds are bathed in
foam.

‘Up, Tristram, up,’ men cry, ‘thou moonstruck
knight !’

What foul fiend rides thee ? On into the
fight !’

—Above the din her voice is in my ears ;
I see her form glide through the crossing
spears.—

Iseult ! . . .

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*

Ah ! he wanders forth again ;
We cannot keep him ; now, as then,
There’s a secret in his breast
Which will never let him rest.
These musing fits in the green wood
They cloud the brain, they dull the blood !
—His sword is sharp, his horse is good ;
Beyond the mountains will he see
The famous towns of Italy,

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

And label with the blessed sign
The heathen Saxons on the Rhine.
At Arthur's side he fights once more
With the Roman Emperor.
There's many a gay knight where he goes
Will help him to forget his care ;
The march, the leaguer, Heaven's blithe air,
The neighing steeds, the ringing blows—
Sick pining comes not where these are.
Ah ! what boots it, that the jest
Lightens every other brow,
What, that every other breast
Dances as the trumpets blōw,
If one's own heart beats not light
On the waves of the toss'd fight,
If oneself cannot get free
From the clog of misery ?
Thy lovely youthful wife grows pale
Watching by the salt sea-tide
With her children at her side
For the gleam of thy white sail.
Home, Tristram, to thy halls again !
To our lonely sea complain,
To our forests tell thy pain !

Tristram

All round the forest sweeps off, black in shade,
But it is moonlight in the open glade ;
And in the bottom of the glade shine clear
The forest-chapel and the fountain near.

NARRATIVE POEMS

—I think, I have a fever in my blood ;
Come, let me leave the shadow of this wood,
Ride down, and bathe my hot brow in the flood.
—Mild shines the cold spring in the moon's
clear light ;
God ! 'tis *her* face plays in the waters bright.
' Fair love,' she says, ' canst thou forget so soon,
At this soft hour, under this sweet moon ? '—
Iseult ! . . .

* * * *

Ah, poor soul ! if this be so,
Only death can balm thy woe.
The solitudes of the green wood
Had no medicine for thy mood ;
The rushing battle clear'd thy blood
As little as did solitude.
—Ah ! his eyelids slowly break
Their hot seals, and let him wake ;
What new change shall we now see ?
A happier ? Worse it cannot be.

Tristram

Is my page here ? Come, turn me to the fire !
Upon the window-panes the moon shines bright ;
The wind is down—but she'll not come to-night.
Ah no ! she is asleep in Cornwall now,
Far hence ; her dreams are fair—smooth is her
brow ;

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

Of me she recks not, nor my vain desire.
—I have had dreams, I have had dreams, my
page,
Would take a score years from a strong man's
age ;
And with a blood like mine, will leave, I fear,
Scant leisure for a second messenger.
—My princess, art thou there? Sweet, do not
wait !
To bed, and sleep ! my fever is gone by ;
To-night my page shall keep me company.
Where do the children sleep? kiss them for
me !
Poor child, thou art almost as pale as I ;
This comes of nursing long and watching late.
To bed—good night !

* * * *

She left the gleam-lit fireplace,
She came to the bed-side ;
She took his hands in hers—her tears
Down on his wasted fingers rain'd.
She raised her eyes upon his face—
Not with a look of wounded pride,
A look as if the heart complained—
Her look was like a sad embrace ;
The gaze of one who can divine
A grief, and sympathise.
Sweet flower ! thy children's eyes
Are not more innocent than thine.

NARRATIVE POEMS

But they sleep in shelter'd rest,
Like helpless birds in the warm nest,
On the castle's southern side ;
Where feebly comes the mournful roar
Of buffeting wind and surging tide
Through many a room and corridor.
—Full on their window the moon's ray
Makes their chamber as bright as day.
It shines upon the blank white walls,
And on the snowy pillow falls,
And on two angel-heads doth play
Turn'd to each other—the eyes closed,
The lashes on the cheeks reposed.
Round each sweet brow the cap close-set
Hardly lets peep the golden hair ;
Through the soft-open'd lips the air
Scarcely moves the coverlet.
One little wandering arm is thrown
At random on the counterpane,
And often the fingers close in haste
As if their baby-owner chased
The butterflies again.
This stir they have, and this alone ;
But else they are so still !
—Ah, tired madcaps ! you lie still ;
But were you at the window now,
To look forth on the fairy sight
Of your illumined haunts by night,
To see the park-glades where you play
Far lovelier than they are by day,
To see the sparkle on the eaves,

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

And upon every giant-bough
Of those old oaks, whose wet red leaves
Are jewell'd with bright drops of rain—
How would your voices run again !
And far beyond the sparkling trees
Of the castle-park one sees
The bare heaths spreading, clear as day,
Moor behind moor, far, far away,
Into the heart of Brittany.
And here and there, lock'd by the land,
Long inlets of smooth glittering sea,
And many a stretch of watery sand
All shining in the white moon-beams—
But you see fairer in your dreams !

What voices are these on the clear night-air ?
What lights in the court—what steps on the
stair ?

NARRATIVE POEMS

II

Iseult of Ireland

Tristram

RAISE the light, my page ! that I may see her.—
Thou art come at last, then, haughty Queen !
Long I've waited, long I've fought my fever ;
Late thou comest, cruel thou hast been.

Iseult

Blame me not, poor sufferer ! that I tarried ;
Bound I was, I could not break the band.
Chide not with the past, but feel the present !
I am here—we meet—I hold thy hand.

Tristram

Thou art come, indeed—thou hast rejoin'd me ;
Thou hast dared it—but too late to save.
Fear not now that men should tax thine honour !
I am dying : build—(thou may'st)—my grave !

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

Iseult

Tristram, ah, for love of Heaven, speak kindly !
What, I hear these bitter words from thee ?
Sick with grief I am, and faint with travel—
Take my hand—dear Tristram, look on me !

Tristram

I forgot, thou comest from thy voyage—
Yes, the spray is on thy cloak and hair.
But thy dark eyes are not dimm'd, proud Iseult !
And thy beauty never was more fair.

Iseult

Ah, harsh flatterer ! let alone my beauty !
I, like thee, have left my youth afar.
Take my hand, and touch these wasted fingers—
See my cheek and lips, how white they are !

Tristram

Thou art paler—but thy sweet charm, Iseult !
Would not fade with the dull years away.
Ah, how fair thou standest in the moonlight !
I forgive thee, Iseult !—thou wilt stay ?

NARRATIVE POEMS

Iseult

Fear me not, I will be always with thee ;
I will watch thee, tend thee, soothe thy
 pain ;
Sing thee tales of true, long-parted lovers,
Join'd at evening of their days again.

Tristram

No, thou shalt not speak ! I should be finding
 Something alter'd in thy courtly tone.
Sit—sit by me ! I will think, we've lived so
 In the green wood, all our lives, alone.

Iseult

Alter'd, Tristram ? Not in courts, believe me,
 Love like mine is alter'd in the breast ;
Courtly life is light and cannot reach it—
 Ah ! it lives, because so deep-suppress'd !

What, thou think'st men speak in courtly
 chambers
 Words by which the wretched are consoled ?
What, thou think'st this aching brow was
 cooler,
 Circled, Tristram, by a band of gold ?

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

Royal state with Marc, my deep-wrong'd
husband—

That was bliss to make my sorrows flee !
Silken courtiers whispering honied nothings—
Those were friends to make me false to thee !

Ah, on which, if both our lots were balanced,
Was indeed the heaviest burden thrown—
Thee, a pining exile in thy forest,
Me, a smiling queen upon my throne ?

Vain and strange debate, where both have suffer'd,
Both have pass'd a youth consumed and sad,
Both have brought their anxious day to evening,
And have now short space for being glad !

Join'd we are henceforth ; nor will thy people,
Nor thy younger Iseult take it ill,
That a former rival shares her office,
When she sees her humbled, pale, and still.

I, a faded watcher by thy pillow,
I, a statue on thy chapel-floor,
Pour'd in prayer before the Virgin-Mother,
Rouse no anger, make no rivals more.

She will cry : ' Is this the foe I dreaded ?
This his idol ? this that royal bride ?
Ah, an hour of health would purge his eyesight !
Stay, pale queen ! for ever by my side.'

NARRATIVE POEMS

Hush, no words ! that smile, I see, forgives me.
I am now thy nurse, I bid thee sleep.
Close thine eyes—this flooding moonlight blinds
them !—
Nay, all 's well again ! thou must not weep.

Tristram

I am happy ! yet I feel, there 's something
Swells my heart, and takes my breath away.
Through a mist I see thee ; near—come nearer !
Bend—bend down !—I yet have much to say.

Iseult

Heaven ! his head sinks back upon the pillow—
Tristram ! Tristram ! let thy heart not fail !
Call on God and on the holy angels !
What, love, courage !—Christ ! he is so pale.

Tristram

Hush, 'tis vain, I feel my end approaching !
This is what my mother said should be,
When the fierce pains took her in the forest,
The deep draughts of death, in bearing me.

' Son,' she said, ' thy name shall be of sorrow ;
Tristram art thou call'd for my death's sake.'
So she said, and died in the drear forest.
Grief since then his home with me doth make.

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

I am dying.—Start not, nor look wildly !
Me, thy living friend, thou canst not save.
But, since living we were ununited,
Go not far, O Iseult ! from my grave.

Close mine eyes, then seek the princess Iseult ;
Speak her fair, she is of royal blood !
Say, I will'd so, that thou stay beside me—
She will grant it ; she is kind and good.

Now to sail the seas of death I leave thee—
One last kiss upon the living shore !

Iseult

Tristram !—Tristram !—stay—receive me with
thee !
Iseult leaves thee, Tristram ! never more.

* * * *

You see them clear—the moon shines bright.
Slow, slow and softly, where she stood,
She sinks upon the ground ;—her hood
Had fallen back ; her arms outspread
Still hold her lover's hand ; her head
Is bow'd, half-buried, on the bed.
O'er the blanch'd sheet her raven hair
Lies in disorder'd streams ; and there,
Strung like white stars, the pearls still are,
And the golden bracelets, heavy and rare,

NARRATIVE POEMS

Flash on her white arms still.
The very same which yesternight
Flash'd in the silver sconces' light,
When the feast was gay and the laughter loud
In Tyntagel's palace proud.
But then they deck'd a restless ghost
With hot-flush'd cheeks and brilliant eyes,
And quivering lips on which the tide
Of courtly speech abruptly died,
And a glance which over the crowded floor,
The dancers, and the festive host,
Flew ever to the door.
That the knights eyed her in surprise,
And the dames whispered scoffingly :
' Her moods, good lack, they pass like showers !
But yesternight and she would be
As pale and still as wither'd flowers,
And now to-night she laughs and speaks
And has a colour in her cheeks ;
Christ keep us from such fantasy !'—

Yes, now the longing is o'erpast,
Which, dogg'd by fear and fought by shame,
Shook her weak bosom day and night,
Consumed her beauty like a flame,
And dimm'd it like the desert-blast.
And though the bed-clothes hide her face,
Yet were it lifted to the light,
The sweet expression of her brow
Would charm the gazer, till his thought
Erased the ravages of time,

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

Fill'd up the hollow cheek, and brought
A freshness back as of her prime—
So healing is her quiet now.
So perfectly the lines express
A tranquil, settled loveliness,
Her younger rival's purest grace.

The air of the December-night
Steals coldly around the chamber bright,
Where those lifeless lovers be ;
Swinging with it, in the light
Flaps the ghostlike tapestry.
And on the arras wrought you see
A stately Huntsman, clad in green,
And round him a fresh forest-scene.
On that clear forest-knoll he stays,
With his pack round him, and delays.
He stares and stares, with troubled face,
At this huge, gleam-lit fireplace,
At that bright, iron-figured door,
And those blown rushes on the floor.
He gazes down into the room
With heated cheeks and flurried air,
And to himself he seems to say :
*'What place is this, and who are they ?
Who is that kneeling Lady fair ?
And on his pillows that pale Knight
Who seems of marble on a tomb ?
How comes it here, this chamber bright,
Through whose mullion'd windows clear
The castle-court all wet with rain,*

NARRATIVE POEMS

*The drawbridge and the moat appear,
And then the beach, and, mark'd with spray,
The sunken reefs, and far away
The unquiet bright Atlantic plain?
—What, has some glamour made me sleep,
And sent me with my dogs to sweep,
By night, with boisterous bugle-peal,
Through some old, sea-side, knightly hall,
Not in the free green wood at all?
That Knight's asleep, and at her prayer
That Lady by the bed doth kneel—
Then hush, thou boisterous bugle-peal !'
—The wild boar rustles in his lair ;
The fierce hounds snuff the tainted air ;
But lord and hounds keep rooted there.*

Cheer, cheer thy dogs into the brake,
O Hunter ! and without a fear
Thy golden-tassell'd bugle blow,
And through the glades thy pastime take—
For thou wilt rouse no sleepers here !
For these thou seest are unmoved ;
Cold, cold as those who lived and loved
A thousand years ago.

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

III

Iseult of Brittany

A YEAR had flown, and o'er the sea away,
In Cornwall, Tristram and Queen Iseult lay ;
In King Marc's chapel, in Tyntagel old—
There in a ship they bore those lovers cold.

The young surviving Iseult, one bright day,
Had wander'd forth. Her children were at
play

In a green circular hollow in the heath
Which borders the sea-shore—a country path
Creeps over it from the till'd fields behind.
The hollow's grassy banks are soft-inclined,
And to one standing on them, far and near
The lone unbroken view spreads bright and clear
Over the waste. This cirque of open ground
Is light and green ; the heather, which all round
Creeps thickly, grows not here ; but the pale
grass

Is strewn with rocks, and many a shiver'd mass

NARRATIVE POEMS

Of vein'd white-gleaming quartz, and here and
there

Dotted with holly-trees and juniper.

In the smooth centre of the opening stood

Three hollies side by side, and made a screen,

Warm with the winter-sun, of burnish'd green

With scarlet berries gemm'd, the fell-fare's food.

Under the glittering hollies Iseult stands,

Watching her children play ; their little hands

Are busy gathering spars of quartz, and streams

Of stagshorn for their hats ; anon, with screams

Of mad delight they drop their spoils, and bound

Among the holly-clumps and broken ground,

Racing full speed, and startling in their rush

The fell-fares and the speckled missel-thrush

Out of their glossy coverts ;—but when now

Their cheeks were flush'd, and over each hot
brow,

Under the feather'd hats of the sweet pair,

In blinding masses shower'd the golden hair—

Then Iseult call'd them to her, and the three

Cluster'd under the holly-screen, and she

Told them an old-world Breton history.

Warm in their mantles wrapt the three stood
there,

Under the hollies, in the clear still air—

Mantles with those rich furs deep glistening

Which Venice ships do from swart Egypt bring.

Long they stay'd still—then, pacing at their ease,

Moved up and down under the glossy trees.

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

But still, as they pursued their warm dry road,
From Iseult's lips the unbroken story flow'd,
And still the children listen'd, their blue eyes
Fix'd on their mother's face in wide surprise ;
Nor did their looks stray once to the sea-side,
Nor to the brown heaths round them, bright and
wide,

Nor to the snow, which, though 't was all away
From the open heath, still by the hedgerows lay,
Nor to the shining sea-fowl, that with screams
Bore up from where the bright Atlantic gleams,
Swooping to landward ; nor to where, quite clear,
The fell-fares settled on the thickets near.

And they would still have listen'd, till dark night
Came keen and chill down on the heather bright ;
But, when the red glow on the sea grew cold,
And the grey turrets of the castle old
Look'd sternly through the frosty evening-air,
Then Iseult took by the hand those children fair,
And brought her tale to an end, and found the
path,
And led them home over the darkening heath.

And is she happy ? Does she see unmoved
The days in which she might have lived and
loved

Slip without bringing bliss slowly away,
One after one, to-morrow like to-day ?
Joy has not found her yet, nor ever will—
Is it this thought which makes her mien so still,
Her features so fatigued, her eyes, though sweet,

NARRATIVE POEMS

So sunk, so rarely lifted save to meet
Her children's? She moves slow; her voice alone
Hath yet an infantine and silver tone,
But even that comes languidly; in truth,
She seems one dying in a mask of youth.

And now she will go home, and softly lay
Her laughing children in their beds, and play
Awhile with them before they sleep; and then
She'll light her silver lamp, which fishermen
Dragging their nets through the rough waves,
afar,

Along this iron coast, know like a star,
And take her broidery-frame, and there she'll sit
Hour after hour, her gold curls sweeping it;
Lifting her soft-bent head only to mind
Her children, or to listen to the wind.
And when the clock peals midnight, she will
move

Her work away, and let her fingers rove
Across the shaggy brows of Tristram's hound
Who lies, guarding her feet, along the ground;
Or else she will fall musing, her blue eyes
Fixt, her slight hands clasp'd on her lap; then
rise,

And at her prie-dieu kneel, until she have told
Her rosary-beads of ebony tipp'd with gold,
Then to her soft sleep—and to-morrow'll be
To-day's exact repeated effigy.

Yes, it is lonely for her in her hall.
The children, and the grey-hair'd seneschal,

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

Her women, and Sir Tristram's aged hound,
Are there the sole companions to be found.
But these she loves; and noisier life than this
She would find ill to bear, weak as she is.
She has her children, too, and night and day
Is with them; and the wide heaths where they
 play,
The hollies, and the cliff, and the sea-shore,
The sand, the sea-birds, and the distant sails,
These are to her dear as to them; the tales
With which this day the children she beguiled
She gleaned from Breton grandames, when a
 child,
In every hut along this sea-coast wild.
She herself loves them still, and, when they are
 told,
Can forget all to hear them, as of old.

Dear saints, it is not sorrow, as I hear,
Not suffering, which shuts up eye and ear
To all that has delighted them before,
And lets us be what we were once no more.
No, we may suffer deeply, yet retain
Power to be moved and soothed, for all our
 pain,
By what of old pleased us, and will again.
No, 'tis the gradual furnace of the world,
In whose hot air our spirits are upcurl'd
Until they crumble, or else grow like steel—
Which kills in us the bloom, the youth, the
 spring—

NARRATIVE POEMS

Which leaves the fierce necessity to feel,
But takes away the power—this can avail,
By drying up our joy in everything,
To make our former pleasures all seem stale.
This, or some tyrannous single thought, some fit
Of passion, which subdues our souls to it,
Till for its sake alone we live and move—
Call it ambition, or remorse, or love—
This too can change us wholly, and make seem
All which we did before, shadow and dream.

And yet, I swear, it angers me to see
How this fool passion gulls men potently ;
Being, in truth, but a diseased unrest,
And an unnatural overheat at best.
How they are full of languor and distress
Not having it ; which when they do possess,
They straightway are burnt up with fume and
care,
And spend their lives in posting here and there
Where this plague drives them ; and have little
ease,
Are furious with themselves, and hard to please.
Like that bald Cæsar, the famed Roman wight,
Who wept at reading of a Grecian knight
Who made a name at younger years than he ;
Or that renown'd mirror of chivalry,
Prince Alexander, Philip's peerless son,
Who carried the great war from Macedon
Into the Soudan's realm, and thundered on
To die at thirty-five in Babylon.

NARRATIVE POEMS

The other warded off the drooping boughs.
But still she chatted on, with her blue eyes
Fix'd full on Merlin's face, her stately prize.
Her 'haviour had the morning's fresh clear grace,
The spirit of the woods was in her face.
She look'd so witching fair, that learned wight
Forgot his craft, and his best wits took flight ;
And he grew fond, and eager to obey
His mistress, use her empire as she may.

They came to where the brushwood ceased, and
day
Peer'd 'twixt the stems ; and the ground broke
away,
In a sloped sward down to a brawling brook ;
And up as high as where they stood to look
On the brook's farther side was clear, but then
The underwood and trees began again.
This open glen was studded thick with thorns
Then white with blossom ; and you saw the
horns,
Through last year's fern, of the shy fallow-deer
Who come at noon down to the water here.
You saw the bright-eyed squirrels dart along
Under the thorns on the green sward ; and strong
The blackbird whistled from the dingles near,
And the weird chipping of the woodpecker
Rang lonelily and sharp ; the sky was fair,
And a fresh breath of spring stirr'd everywhere.
Merlin and Vivian stopp'd on the slope's brow,
To gaze on the light sea of leaf and bough

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

Which glistering plays all round them, lone and
mild,

As if to itself the quiet forest smiled.

Upon the brow-top grew a thorn, and here

The grass was dry and moss'd, and you saw clear

Across the hollow ; white anemonies

Starr'd the cool turf, and clumps of primroses

Ran out from the dark underwood behind.

No fairer resting-place a man could find.

' Here let us halt,' said Merlin then ; and she

Nodded, and tied her palfrey to a tree.

They sate them down together, and a sleep

Fell upon Merlin, more like death, so deep.

Her finger on her lips, then Vivian rose,

And from her brown-lock'd head the wimple
throws,

And takes it in her hand, and waves it over

The blossom'd thorn-tree and her sleeping lover.

Nine times she waved the fluttering wimple
round,

And made a little plot of magic ground.

And in that daisied circle, as men say,

Is Merlin prisoner till the judgment-day ;

But she herself whither she will can rove—

For she was passing weary of his love.

SAINT BRANDAN

SAINT BRANDAN sails the northern main ;
The brotherhoods of saints are glad.
He greets them once, he sails again ;
So late !—such storms !—The Saint is mad !

He heard, across the howling seas,
Chime convent-bells on wintry nights ;
He saw, on spray-swept Hebrides,
Twinkle the monastery-lights.

But north, still north, Saint Brandan steer'd—
And now no bells, no convents more !
The hurtling Polar lights are near'd,
The sea without a human shore.

At last—(it was the Christmas night ;
Stars shone after a day of storm)—
He sees float past an iceberg white,
And on it—Christ !—a living form.

That furtive mien, that scowling eye,
Of hair that red and tufted fell—
It is—Oh, where shall Brandan fly ?—
The traitor Judas, out of hell !

SAINT BRANDAN

Palsied with terror, Brandan sate ;
The moon was bright, the iceberg near.
He hears a voice sigh humbly : ‘ Wait !
By high permission I am here.

‘ One moment wait, thou holy man !
On earth my crime, my death, they knew ;
My name is under all men’s ban—
Ah, tell them of my respite too !

‘ Tell them, one blessed Christmas-night—
(It was the first after I came,
Breathing self-murder, frenzy, spite,
To rue my guilt in endless flame)—

‘ I felt, as I in torment lay
’Mid the souls plagued by heavenly power,
An angel touch mine arm, and say :
Go hence and cool thyself an hour !

‘ “ Ah, whence this mercy, Lord ? ” I said.
*The Leper recollect, said he,
Who ask’d the passers-by for aid,
In Joppa, and thy charity.*

‘ Then I remember’d how I went,
In Joppa, through the public street,
One morn when the sirocco spent
Its storms of dust with burning heat ;

NARRATIVE POEMS

‘ And in the street a leper sate,
Shivering with fever, naked, old ;
Sand raked his sores from heel to pate,
The hot wind fever’d him five-fold.

‘ He gazed upon me as I pass’d,
And murmur’d : *Help me, or I die !*—
To the poor wretch my cloak I cast,
Saw him look eased, and hurried by.

‘ Oh, Brandan, think what grace divine,
What blessing must full goodness shower,
When fragment of it small, like mine,
Hath such inestimable power !

‘ Well-fed, well-clothed, well-friended, I
Did that chance act of good, that one !
Then went my way to kill and lie—
Forgot my good as soon as done.

‘ That germ of kindness, in the womb
Of mercy caught, did not expire ;
Outlives my guilt, outlives my doom,
And friends me in the pit of fire.

‘ Once every year, when carols wake,
On earth, the Christmas-night’s repose,
Arising from the sinners’ lake,
I journey to these healing snows.

SAINT BRANDAN

'I stanch with ice my burning breast,
With silence balm my whirling brain.
O Brandan! to this hour of rest
That Joppa leper's ease was pain.'——

Tears started to Saint Brandan's eyes ;
He bow'd his head, he breathed a prayer—
Then look'd, and lo, the frosty skies !
The iceberg, and no Judas there !

THE NECKAN

IN summer, on the headlands,
The Baltic Sea along,
Sits Neckan with his harp of gold,
And sings his plaintive song.

Green rolls beneath the headlands,
Green rolls the Baltic Sea ;
And there, below the Neckan's feet,
His wife and children be.

He sings not of the ocean,
Its shells and roses pale ;
Of earth, of earth the Neckan sings,
He hath no other tale.

He sits upon the headlands,
And sings a mournful stave
Of all he saw and felt on earth
Far from the kind sea-wave.

Sings how, a knight, he wander'd
By castle, field, and town—
But earthly knights have harder hearts
Than the sea-children own.

THE NECKAN

Sings of his earthly bridal—

Priests, knights, and ladies gay.

‘—And who art thou,’ the priest began,

‘Sir Knight, who wedd’st to-day?’—

‘—I am no knight,’ he answered ;

‘From the sea-waves I come.’—

The knights drew sword, the ladies scream’d,

The surpliced priest stood dumb.

He sings how from the chapel

He vanish’d with his bride,

And bore her down to the sea-halls,

Beneath the salt sea-tide.

He sings how she sits weeping

’Mid shells that round her lie.

‘—False Neckan shares my bed,’ she weeps ;

‘No Christian mate have I.’—

He sings how through the billows

He rose to earth again,

And sought a priest to sign the cross,

That Neckan Heaven might gain.

He sings how, on an evening,

Beneath the birch-trees cool,

He sate and play’d his harp of gold,

Beside the river-pool.

NARRATIVE POEMS

Beside the pool sate Neckan—
Tears fill'd his mild blue eye.
On his white mule, across the bridge,
A cassock'd priest rode by.

‘—Why sitt'st thou there, O Neckan,
And play'st thy harp of gold?
Sooner shall this my staff bear leaves,
Than thou shalt Heaven behold.’—

But, lo, the staff, it budded!
It green'd, it branch'd, it waved.
‘—O ruth of God,’ the priest cried out,
‘This lost sea-creature saved!’

The cassock'd priest rode onwards,
And vanished with his mule;
But Neckan in the twilight grey
Wept by the river-pool.

He wept: ‘The earth hath kindness,
The sea, the starry poles;
Earth, sea, and sky, and God above—
But, ah, not human souls!’

In summer, on the headlands,
The Baltic Sea along,
Sits Neckan with his harp of gold,
And sings this plaintive song.

THE FORSAKEN MERMAN

COME, dear children, let us away ;
Down and away below !
Now my brothers call from the bay,
Now the great winds shoreward blow,
Now the salt tides seaward flow ;
Now the wild white horses play,
Champ and chafe and toss in the spray.
Children dear, let us away !
This way, this way !

Call her once before you go—
Call once yet !
In a voice that she will know :
'Margaret ! Margaret !'
Children's voices should be dear
(Call once more) to a mother's ear ;
Children's voices, wild with pain—
Surely she will come again !
Call her once and come away ;
This way, this way !
'Mother dear, we cannot stay !
The wild white horses foam and fret.'
Margaret ! Margaret !

NARRATIVE POEMS

Come, dear children, come away down ;
Call no more !
One last look at the white-wall'd town,
And the little grey church on the windy shore ;
Then come down !
She will not come though you call all day ;
Come away, come away !

Children dear, was it yesterday
We heard the sweet bells over the bay ?
In the caverns where we lay,
Through the surf and through the swell,
The far-off sound of a silver bell ?
Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,
Where the winds are all asleep ;
Where the spent lights quiver and gleam,
Where the salt weed sways in the stream,
Where the sea-beasts, ranged all round,
Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground ;
Where the sea-snakes coil and twine,
Dry their mail and bask in the brine ;
Where great whales come sailing by,
Sail and sail, with unshut eye,
Round the world for ever and aye ?
When did music come this way ?
Children dear, was it yesterday ?

Children dear, was it yesterday
(Call yet once) that she went away ?
Once she sate with you and me,
On a red gold throne in the heart of the sea,

THE FORSAKEN MERMAN

And the youngest sate on her knee.
She comb'd its bright hair, and she tended it
well,

When down swung the sound of a far-off bell.
She sigh'd, she look'd up through the clear
green sea ;

She said : ' I must go, for my kinsfolk pray
In the little grey church on the shore to-day.
'Twill be Easter-time in the world—ah me !
And I lose my poor soul, Merman ! here with
thee.'

I said : ' Go up, dear heart, through the waves ;
Say thy prayer, and come back to the kind sea-
caves !'

She smiled, she went up through the surf in the
bay.

Children dear, was it yesterday ?

Children dear, were we long alone ?
' The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan ;
Long prayers,' I said, ' in the world they say ;
Come !' I said ; and we rose through the surf
in the bay.

We went up the beach, by the sandy down
Where the sea-stocks bloom, to the white-wall'd
town ;

Through the narrow paved streets, where all
was still,

To the little grey church on the windy hill.
From the church came a murmur of folk at
their prayers,

NARRATIVE POEMS

But we stood without in the cold blowing airs.
We climb'd on the graves, on the stones worn
with rains,

And we gazed up the aisle through the small
leaded panes.

She sate by the pillar ; we saw her clear :
' Margaret, hist ! come quick, we are here !
Dear heart,' I said, ' we are long alone ;
The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan.'
But, ah, she gave me never a look,
For her eyes were seal'd to the holy book !
Loud prays the priest ; shut stands the door.
Come away, children, call no more !
Come away, come down, call no more !

Down, down, down !

Down to the depths of the sea !

She sits at her wheel in the humming town,
Singing most joyfully.

Hark what she sings : ' O joy, O joy,
For the humming street, and the child with its
toy !

For the priest, and the bell, and the holy well ;
For the wheel where I spun,
And the blessed light of the sun !'

And so she sings her fill,
Singing most joyfully,

Till the spindle drops from her hand,
And the whizzing wheel stands still.

She steals to the window, and looks at the sand,
And over the sand at the sea ;

THE FORSAKEN MERMAN

And her eyes are set in a stare ;
And anon there breaks a sigh,
And anon there drops a tear,
From a sorrow-clouded eye,
And a heart sorrow-laden,
A long, long sigh ;
For the cold strange eyes of a little Mermaid
And the gleam of her golden hair.

— Come away, away children ;
Come children, come down !
The hoarse wind blows coldly ;
Lights shine in the town.
She will start from her slumber
When gusts shake the door ;
She will hear the winds howling,
Will hear the waves roar.
We shall see, while above us
The waves roar and whirl,
A ceiling of amber,
A pavement of pearl.
Singing : ‘ Here came a mortal,
But faithless was she !
And alone dwell for ever
The kings of the sea.’

But, children, at midnight,
When soft the winds blow,
When clear falls the moonlight,
When spring-tides are low ;
When sweet airs come seaward

NARRATIVE POEMS

From heaths starr'd with broom,
And high rocks throw mildly
On the blanch'd sands a gloom ;
Up the still, glistening beaches,
Up the creeks we will hie,
Over banks of bright seaweed
The ebb-tide leaves dry.
We will gaze, from the sand-hills,
At the white, sleeping town ;
At the church on the hill-side—
And then come back down.
Singing : 'There dwells a loved one,
But cruel is she !
She left lonely for ever
The kings of the sea.'

ELEGIAC POEMS



THE SCHOLAR-GIPSY⁹

Go, for they call you, shepherd, from the hill ;
Go, shepherd, and untie the wattled cotes !
No longer leave thy wistful flock unfed,
Nor let thy bawling fellows rack their throats,
Nor the cropp'd herbage shoot another head.
But when the fields are still,
And the tired men and dogs all gone to rest,
And only the white sheep are sometimes seen
Cross and recross the strips of moon-blanch'd
green,
Come, shepherd, and again begin the quest !

Here, where the reaper was at work of late—
In this high field's dark corner, where he leaves
His coat, his basket, and his earthen cruse,
And in the sun all morning binds the sheaves,
Then here, at noon, comes back his stores
to use—
Here will I sit and wait,
While to my ear from uplands far away
The bleating of the folded flocks is borne,
With distant cries of reapers in the corn—
All the live murmur of a summer's day.

ELEGIAC POEMS

Screen'd is this nook o'er the high, half-reap'd
field,

And here till sun-down, shepherd ! will I be.

Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies
peep,

And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see
Pale pink convolvulus in tendrils creep ;

And air-swept lindens yield

Their scent, and rustle down their perfumed
showers

Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,
And bower me from the August sun with
shade ;

And the eye travels down to Oxford's towers.

And near me on the grass lies Glanvil's book—

Come, let me read the oft-read tale again !

The story of the Oxford scholar poor,

Of pregnant parts and quick inventive brain,

Who, tired of knocking at preferment's door,

One summer-morn forsook

His friends, and went to learn the gipsy-lore,

And roam'd the world with that wild brother-
hood,

And came, as most men deem'd, to little
good,

But came to Oxford and his friends no more.

But once, years after, in the country-lanes,

Two scholars, whom at college erst he knew,

Met him, and of his way of life enquired ;

THE SCHOLAR-GIPSY

Whereat he answer'd, that the gipsy-crew,
His mates, had arts to rule as they desired
The workings of men's brains,
And they can bind them to what thoughts
they will.

'And I,' he said, 'the secret of their art,
When fully learn'd, will to the world impart ;
But it needs heaven-sent moments for this
skill.'

This said, he left them, and return'd no more.—
But rumours hung about the country-side,
That the lost Scholar long was seen to stray,
Seen by rare glimpses, pensive and tongue-tied,
In hat of antique shape, and cloak of grey,
The same the gipsies wore.
Shepherds had met him on the Hurst in spring ;
At some lone alehouse in the Berkshire
moors,
On the warm ingle-bench, the smock-frock'd
boors
Had found him seated at their entering,

But, 'mid their drink and clatter, he would fly.
And I myself seem half to know thy looks,
And put the shepherds, wanderer ! on thy
trace ;
And boys who in lone wheatfields scare the
rooks
I ask if thou hast pass'd their quiet place ;
Or in my boat I lie

ELEGIAC POEMS

Moor'd to the cool bank in the summer-heats,
 'Mid wide grass meadows which the sunshine
 fills,
 And watch the warm, green-muffled Cumner
 hills,
And wonder if thou haunt'st their shy retreats.

For most, I know, thou lov'st retired ground !
Thee at the ferry Oxford riders blithe,
 Returning home on summer-nights, have
 met
Crossing the stripling Thames at Bab-lock-
 hithe,
 Trailing in the cool stream thy fingers wet,
 As the punt's rope chops round ;
And leaning backward in a pensive dream,
 And fostering in thy lap a heap of flowers
 Pluck'd in shy fields and distant Wychwood
 bowers,
And thine eyes resting on the moonlit stream.

And then they land, and thou art seen no more !—
Maidens, who from the distant hamlets come
 To dance around the Fyfield elm in May,
Oft through the darkening fields have seen
 thee roam,
 Or cross a stile into the public way.
 Oft thou hast given them store
Of flowers—the frail-leaf'd, white anemony,
 Dark bluebells drench'd with dews of summer
 eves,

THE SCHOLAR-GIPSY

And purple orchises with spotted leaves—
But none hath words she can report of thee.

And, above Godstow Bridge, when hay-time's
here
In June, and many a scythe in sunshine flames,
Men who through those wide fields of breezy
grass
Where black-wing'd swallows haunt the glitter-
ing Thames,
To bathe in the abandon'd lasher pass,
Have often pass'd thee near
Sitting upon the river bank o'ergrown ;
Mark'd thine outlandish garb, thy figure
spare,
Thy dark vague eyes, and soft abstracted
air—
But, when they came from bathing, thou wast
gone !

At some lone homestead in the Cunner hills,
Where at her open door the housewife darns,
Thou hast been seen, or hanging on a
gate
To watch the threshers in the mossy barns.
Children, who early range these slopes and
late
For cresses from the rills,
Have known thee eyeing, all an April-day,
The springing pastures and the feeding
kine ;

ELEGIAC POEMS

And mark'd thee, when the stars come out
and shine,
Through the long dewy grass move slow away.

In autumn, on the skirts of Bagley Wood—
Where most the gipsies by the turf-edged way
Pitch their smoked tents, and every bush
you see
With scarlet patches tagg'd and shreds of grey,
Above the forest-ground called Thessaly—
The blackbird, picking food,
Sees thee, nor stops his meal, nor fears at all ;
So often has he known thee past him stray,
Rapt, twirling in thy hand a wither'd spray,
And waiting for the spark from heaven to fall.

And once, in winter, on the causeway chill
Where home through flooded fields foot-
travellers go,
Have I not pass'd thee on the wooden bridge,
Wrapt in thy cloak and battling with the snow,
Thy face tow'rd Hinksey and its wintry ridge?
And thou hast climb'd the hill,
And gain'd the white brow of the Cumner
range ;
Turn'd once to watch, while thick the snow-
flakes fall,
The line of festal light in Christ-Church
hall—
Then sought thy straw in some sequester'd
grange.

THE SCHOLAR-GIPSY

But what—I dream ! Two hundred years are
flown

Since first thy story ran through Oxford halls,
And the grave Glanvil did the tale inscribe
That thou wert wander'd from the studious
walls

To learn strange arts, and join a gipsy-tribe ;
And thou from earth art gone
Long since, and in some quiet churchyard laid—
Some country-nook, where o'er thy unknown
grave

Tall grasses and white flowering nettles
wave,
Under a dark, red-fruited yew-tree's shade.

—No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours !
For what wears out the life of mortal men ?

'Tis that from change to change their being
rolls ;

'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,
Exhaust the energy of strongest souls
And numb the elastic powers.

Till having used our nerves with bliss and teen,
And tired upon a thousand schemes our wit,
To the just-pausing Genius we remit
Our worn-out life, and are—what we have
been.

Thou hast not lived, why should'st thou perish,
so ?

Thou hadst *one* aim, *one* business, *one* desire ;

ELEGIAC POEMS

Else wert thou long since number'd with
the dead !

Else hadst thou spent, like other men, thy fire !

The generations of thy peers are fled,

And we ourselves shall go ;

But thou possessest an immortal lot,

And we imagine thee exempt from age

And living as thou liv'st on Glanvil's page,

Because thou hadst—what we, alas ! have not.

For early didst thou leave the world, with powers
Fresh, undiverted to the world without,

Firm to their mark, not spent on other
things ;

Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt,

Which much to have tried, in much been
baffled, brings.

O life unlike to ours !

Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,

Of whom each strives, nor knows for what
he strives,

And each half lives a hundred different
lives ;

Who wait like thee, but not, like thee, in hope.

Thou waitest for the spark from heaven ! and we,
Light half-believers of our casual creeds,

Who never deeply felt, nor clearly will'd,

Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,

Whose vague resolves never have been
fulfill'd ;

THE SCHOLAR-GIPSY

For whom each year we see
Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new ;
Who hesitate and falter life away,
And lose to-morrow the ground won to-
day—

Ah ! do not we, wanderer ! await it too ?

Yes, we await it !—but it still delays,
And then we suffer ! and amongst us one,
Who most has suffer'd, takes dejectedly
His seat upon the intellectual throne ;
And all his store of sad experience he
Lays bare of wretched days ;
Tells us his misery's birth and growth and
signs,
And how the dying spark of hope was fed,
And how the breast was soothed, and how
the head,
And all his hourly varied anodynes.

This for our wisest ! and we others pine,
And wish the long unhappy dream would end,
And waive all claim to bliss, and try to bear ;
With close-lipp'd patience for our only friend,
Sad patience, too near neighbour to despair—
But none has hope like thine !
Thou through the fields and through the
woods dost stray,
Roaming the country-side, a truant boy,
Nursing thy project in unclouded joy,
And every doubt long blown by time away.

ELEGIAC POEMS

O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames ;
 Before this strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
 Its heads o'ertax'd, its palsied hearts, was
 rife—

 Fly hence, our contact fear !
Still fly, plunge deeper in the bowering wood !
 Averse, as Dido did with gesture stern
 From her false friend's approach in Hades
 turn,
Wave us away, and keep thy solitude !

Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
Still clutching the inviolable shade,
 With a free, onward impulse brushing
 through,
By night, the silver'd branches of the glade—
 Far on the forest-skirts, where none pursue,
 On some mild pastoral slope
Emerge, and resting on the moonlit pales
 Freshen thy flowers as in former years
 With dew, or listen with enchanted ears,
From the dark dingles, to the nightingales !

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly !
For strong the infection of our mental strife,
 Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils
 for rest ;
And we should win thee from thy own fair
 life,

THE SCHOLAR-GIPSY

Like us distracted, and like us unblest.
Soon, soon thy cheer would die,
Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfix'd thy
powers,
And thy clear aims be cross and shifting
made ;
And then thy glad perennial youth would
fade,
Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours.

Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and
smiles !

—As some grave Tyrian trader, from the sea,
Descried at sunrise an emerging prow
Lifting the cool-hair'd creepers stealthily,
The fringes of a southward-facing brow
Among the Ægæan isles ;
And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,
Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian
wine,
Green, bursting figs, and tunnies steep'd in
brine—

And knew the intruders on his ancient home,

The young light-hearted masters of the waves—
And snatch'd his rudder, and shook out more
sail ;
And day and night held on indignantly
O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,
Betwixt the Syrtes and soft Sicily,
To where the Atlantic raves

ELEGIAC POEMS

Outside the western straits ; and unbent sails
There, where down cloudy cliffs, through
sheets of foam,
Shy traffickers, the dark Iberians come ;
And on the beach undid his corded bales.

THYRSIS¹⁰

A MONODY, *to commemorate the author's friend,*
ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH, *who died at Florence, 1861*

How changed is here each spot man makes or
fills !

In the two Hinkseys nothing keeps the same ;
The village street its haunted mansion lacks,
And from the sign is gone Sibylla's name,
And from the roofs the twisted chimney-
stacks—

Are ye too changed, ye hills ?
See, 'tis no foot of unfamiliar men
To-night from Oxford up your pathway
strays !

Here came I often, often, in old days—
Thyrsis and I ; we still had Thyrsis then.

Runs it not here, the track by Childsworth Farm,
Past the high wood, to where the elm-tree
crowns

The hill behind whose ridge the sunset
flames ?

The signal-elm, that looks on Ilsley Downs,

ELEGIAC POEMS

The Vale, the three lone weirs, the youthful
Thames?—

This winter-eve is warm,
Humid the air! leafless, yet soft as spring,
The tender purple spray on copse and briers!
And that sweet city with her dreaming
spires,
She needs not June for beauty's heightening,

Lovely all times she lies, lovely to-night!—

Only, methinks, some loss of habit's power
Befalls me wandering through this upland
dim.

Once pass'd I blindfold here, at any hour;
Now seldom come I, since I came with him.

That single elm-tree bright
Against the west—I miss it! is it gone?

We prized it dearly; while it stood, we
said,

Our friend, the Gipsy-Scholar, was not
dead;

While the tree lived, he in these fields lived on.

Too rare, too rare, grow now my visits here,

But once I knew each field, each flower, each
stick;

And with the country-folk acquaintance
made

By barn in threshing-time, by new-built rick.

Here, too, our shepherd-pipes we first
assay'd.

THYRSIS

Ah me ! this many a year
My pipe is lost, my shepherd's-holiday !
Needs must I lose them, needs with heavy
heart
Into the world and wave of men depart ;
But Thyrsis of his own will went away.

It irk'd him to be here, he could not rest.
He loved each simple joy the country yields,
He loved his mates ; but yet he could not
keep,
For that a shadow lour'd on the fields,
Here with the shepherds and the silly sheep.
Some life of men unblest
He knew, which made him droop, and fill'd
his head.
He went ; his piping took a troubled sound
Of storms that rage outside our happy
ground ;
He could not wait their passing, he is dead.

So, some tempestuous morn in early June,
When the year's primal burst of bloom is
o'er,
Before the roses and the longest day—
When garden-walks and all the grassy floor
With blossoms red and white of fallen May
And chestnut-flowers are strewn—
So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,
From the wet field, through the vext garden-
trees,

ELEGIAC POEMS

Come with the volleying rain and tossing
breeze :

The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I !

Too quick despairer, wherefore wilt thou go ?

Soon will the high Midsummer pomps come on,
Soon will the musk carnations break and
swell,

Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,
Sweet-William with his homely cottage-
smell,

And stocks in fragrant blow ;
Roses that down the alleys shine afar,
And open, jasmine-muffled lattices,
And groups under the dreaming garden-
trees,
And the full moon, and the white evening-star.

He hearkens not ! light comer, he is flown !

What matters it ? next year he will return,
And we shall have him in the sweet spring-
days,

With whitening hedges, and uncrumpling fern,
And blue-bells trembling by the forest-ways,
And scent of hay new-mown.

But Thyrsis never more we swains shall see ;
See him come back, and cut a smoother
reed,

And blow a strain the world at last shall
heed—

For Time, not Corydon, hath conquer'd thee !

THYRSIS

Alack, for Corydon no rival now !—

But when Sicilian shepherds lost a mate,
Some good survivor with his flute would go,
Piping a ditty sad for Bion's fate ;
And cross the unpermitted ferry's flow
And relax Pluto's brow,
And make leap up with joy the beauteous head
Of Proserpine, among whose crowned hair
Are flowers first open'd on Sicilian air,
And flute his friend, like Orpheus, from the
dead.

O easy access to the hearer's grace

When Dorian shepherds sang to Proserpine !
For she herself had trod Sicilian fields,
She knew the Dorian water's gush divine,
She knew each lily white which Enna yields,
Each rose with blushing face ;
She loved the Dorian pipe, the Dorian strain.
But ah, of our poor Thames she never heard !
Her foot the Cumner cowslips never stirr'd ;
And we should tease her with our plaint in
vain !

Well ! wind-dispersed and vain the words will be,
Yet, Thyrsis, let me give my grief its hour
In the old haunt, and find our tree-topp'd
hill !

Who, if not I, for questing here hath power ?
I know the wood which hides the daffodil,
I know the Fyfield tree,

ELEGIAC POEMS

I know what white, what purple fritillaries
The grassy harvest of the river-fields,
Above by Ensham, down by Sandford, yields,
And what sedged brooks are Thames's tributaries;

I know these slopes ; who knows them if not I?—
But many a dingle on the loved hill-side,
With thorns once studded, old, white-
blossom'd trees,
Where thick the cowslips grew, and far de-
scried
High tower'd the spikes of purple orchises,
Hath since our day put by
The coronals of that forgotten time ;
Down each green bank hath gone the
ploughboy's team,
And only in the hidden brookside gleam
Primroses, orphans of the flowery prime.

Where is the girl, who by the boatman's door,
Above the locks, above the boating throng,
Unmoor'd our skiff when through the
Wytham flats,
Red loosestrife and blond meadow-sweet among
And darting swallows and light water-gnats,
We track'd the shy Thames shore ?
Where are the mowers, who, as the tiny swell
Of our boat passing heaved the river-grass,
Stood with suspended scythe to see us
pass?—
They all are gone, and thou art gone as well !

THYRSIS

Yes, thou art gone ! and round me too the night
In ever-nearing circle weaves her shade.

I see her veil draw soft across the day,
I feel her slowly chilling breath invade
The cheek grown thin, the brown hair
 sprent with grey ;

I feel her finger light
Laid pausefully upon life's headlong train ;—
The foot less prompt to meet the morning
 dew,
The heart less bounding at emotion new,
And hope, once crush'd, less quick to spring
 again.

And long the way appears, which seem'd so short
To the less practised eye of sanguine youth ;
And high the mountain-tops, in cloudy air,
The mountain-tops where is the throne of
 Truth,

Tops in life's morning-sun so bright and
 bare !

Unbreachable the fort
Of the long-batter'd world uplifts its wall ;
And strange and vain the earthly turmoil
 grows,

And near and real the charm of thy repose,
And night as welcome as a friend would fall.

But hush ! the upland hath a sudden loss
Of quiet !—Look, adown the dusk hill-side,
A troop of Oxford hunters going home,

ELEGIAC POEMS

As in old days, jovial and talking, ride !
From hunting with the Berkshire hounds
they come.

Quick ! let me fly, and cross
Into yon farther field !—'Tis done ; and see,
Back'd by the sunset, which doth glorify
The orange and pale violet evening-sky,
Bare on its lonely ridge, the Tree ! the Tree !

I take the omen ! Eve lets down her veil,
The white fog creeps from bush to bush about,
The west unflushes, the high stars grow
bright,

And in the scatter'd farms the lights come out.

I cannot reach the signal-tree to-night,
Yet, happy omen, hail !

Hear it from thy broad lucent Arno-vale
(For there thine earth-forgetting eyelids
keep

The morningless and unawakening sleep
Under the flowery oleanders pale),

Hear it, O Thyrsis, still our tree is there !—

Ah, vain ! These English fields, this upland
dim,

These brambles pale with mist engarlanded,
That lone, sky-pointing tree, are not for him ;
To a boon southern country he is fled,

And now in happier air,
Wandering with the great Mother's train
divine

THYRSIS

(And purer or more subtle soul than thee,
I trow, the mighty Mother doth not see)
Within a folding of the Apennine,

Thou hearest the immortal chants of old !—
Putting his sickle to the perilous grain
In the hot cornfield of the Phrygian king,
For thee the Lityerses-song again
Young Daphnis with his silver voice doth
sing ;ⁱⁱ
Sings his Sicilian fold,
His sheep, his hapless love, his blinded eyes—
And how a call celestial round him rang,
And heavenward from the fountain-brink he
sprang,
And all the marvel of the golden skies.

There thou art gone, and me thou leavest here
Sole in these fields ! yet will I not despair.
Despair I will not, while I yet descry
'Neath the mild canopy of English air
That lonely tree against the western sky.
Still, still these slopes, 'tis clear,
Our Gipsy-Scholar haunts, outliving thee !
Fields where soft sheep from cages pull the
hay,
Woods with anemonies in flower till May,
Know him a wanderer still ; then why not me ?

A fugitive and gracious light he seeks,
Shy to illumine ; and I seek it too.

ELEGIAC POEMS

This does not come with houses or with
gold,
With place, with honour, and a flattering crew ;
'Tis not in the world's market bought and
sold—

But the smooth-slipping weeks
Drop by, and leave its seeker still untired ;
Out of the heed of mortals he is gone,
He wends unfollow'd, he must house alone ;
Yet on he fares, by his own heart inspired.

Thou too, O Thyrsis, on like quest wast bound ;
Thou wanderest with me for a little hour !
Men gave thee nothing ; but this happy
quest,
If men esteem'd thee feeble, gave thee power,
If men procured thee trouble, gave thee rest.
And this rude Cumner ground,
Its fir-topped Hurst, its farms, its quiet fields,
Here cam'st thou in thy jocund youthful
time,
Here was thine height of strength, thy
golden prime !
And still the haunt beloved a virtue yields.

What though the music of thy rustic flute
Kept not for long its happy, country tone ;
Lost it too soon, and learnt a stormy note
Of men contention-tost, of men who groan,
Which task'd thy pipe too sore, and tired
thy throat—

THYRSIS

It fail'd, and thou wast mute !
Yet hadst thou always visions of our light,
And long with men of care thou couldst not
 stay,
And soon thy foot resumed its wandering
 way,
Left human haunt, and on alone till night.

Too rare, too rare, grow now my visits here !
'Mid city-noise, not, as with thee of yore,
Thyrsis ! in reach of sheep-bells is my home.
—Then through the great town's harsh, heart-
 wearying roar,
Let in thy voice a whisper often come,
 To chase fatigue and fear :
Why faintest thou ? I wander'd till I died.
Roam on ! The light we sought is shining still.
Dost thou ask proof ? Our tree yet crowns the
 hill,
Our Scholar travels yet the loved hill-side.

MEMORIAL VERSES

APRIL, 1850

GOETHE in Weimar sleeps, and Greece,
Long since, saw Byron's struggle cease.
But one such death remain'd to come ;
The last poetic voice is dumb—
We stand to-day by Wordsworth's tomb.

When Byron's eyes were shut in death,
We bow'd our head and held our breath.
He taught us little ; but our soul
Had *felt* him like the thunder's roll.
With shivering heart the strife we saw
Of passion with eternal law ;
And yet with reverential awe
We watch'd the fount of fiery life
Which served for that Titanic strife.

When Goethe's death was told, we said :
Sunk, then, is Europe's sagest head.
Physician of the iron age,
Goethe has done his pilgrimage.

MEMORIAL VERSES

He took the suffering human race,
He read each wound, each weakness clear ;
And struck his finger on the place,
And said : *Thou ailest here, and here !*
He look'd on Europe's dying hour
Of fitful dream and feverish power ;
His eye plunged down the weltering strife,
The turmoil of expiring life—
He said : *The end is everywhere,*
Art still has truth, take refuge there !
And he was happy, if to know
Causes of things, and far below
His feet to see the lurid flow
Of terror, and insane distress,
And headlong fate, be happiness.

And Wordsworth !—Ah, pale ghosts, rejoice !
For never has such soothing voice
Been to your shadowy world convey'd,
Since erst, at morn, some wandering shade
Heard the clear song of Orpheus come
Through Hades, and the mournful gloom.
Wordsworth has gone from us—and ye,
Ah, may ye feel his voice as we !
He too upon a wintry clime
Had fallen—on this iron time
Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears.
He found us when the age had bound
Our souls in its benumbing round ;
He spoke, and loosed our heart in tears.
He laid us as we lay at birth

ELEGIAC POEMS

On the cool flowery lap of earth,
Smiles broke from us and we had ease ;
The hills were round us, and the breeze
Went o'er the sun-lit fields again ;
Our foreheads felt the wind and rain.
Our youth return'd ; for there was shed
On spirits that had long been dead,
Spirits dried up and closely furl'd,
The freshness of the early world.

Ah ! since dark days still bring to light
Man's prudence and man's fiery might,
Time may restore us in his course
Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force ;
But where will Europe's latter hour
Again find Wordsworth's healing power ?
Others will teach us how to dare,
And against fear our breast to steel ;
Others will strengthen us to bear—
But who, ah ! who, will make us feel ?
The cloud of mortal destiny,
Others will front it fearlessly—
But who, like him, will put it by ?

Keep fresh the grass upon his grave,
O Rotha, with thy living wave !
Sing him thy best ! for few or none
Hears thy voice right, now he is gone.

STANZAS IN MEMORY OF
EDWARD QUILLINAN

I saw him sensitive in frame,
I knew his spirits low ;
And wish'd him health, success, and fame—
I do not wish it now.

For these are all their own reward,
And leave no good behind ;
They try us, oftenest make us hard,
Less modest, pure, and kind.

Alas ! yet to the suffering man,
In this his mortal state,
Friends could not give what fortune can—
Health, ease, a heart elate.

But he is now by fortune foil'd
No more ; and we retain
The memory of a man unspoil'd,
Sweet, generous, and humane—

With all the fortunate have not,
With gentle voice and brow.
—Alive, we would have changed his lot,
We would not change it now.

STANZAS FROM CARNAC

FAR on its rocky knoll descried
Saint Michael's chapel cuts the sky.
I climb'd ;—beneath me, bright and wide,
Lay the lone coast of Brittany.

Bright in the sunset, weird and still,
It lay beside the Atlantic wave,
As though the wizard Merlin's will
Yet charm'd it from his forest-grave.

Behind me on their grassy sweep,
Bearded with lichen, scrawl'd and grey,
The giant stones of Carnac sleep,
In the mild evening of the May.

No priestly stern procession now
Moves through their rows of pillars old ;
No victims bleed, no Druids bow—
Sheep make the daisied aisles their fold.

STANZAS FROM CARNAC

From bush to bush the cuckoo flies,
The orchis red gleams everywhere ;
Gold furze with broom in blossom vies,
The blue-bells perfume all the air.

And o'er the glistening, lonely land,
Rise up, all round, the Christian spires ;
The church of Carnac, by the strand,
Catches the westering sun's last fires.

And there, across the watery way,
See, low above the tide at flood,
The sickle-sweep of Quiberon Bay,
Whose beach once ran with loyal blood !

And beyond that, the Atlantic wide !—
All round, no soul, no boat, no hail ;
But, on the horizon's verge descried,
Hangs, touch'd with light, one snowy sail !

Ah ! where is he, who should have come ¹²
Where that far sail is passing now,
Past the Loire's mouth, and by the foam
Of Finistère's unquiet brow,

Home, round into the English wave ?
—He tarries where the Rock of Spain
Mediterranean waters lave ;
He enters not the Atlantic main.

ELEGIAC POEMS

Oh, could he once have reach'd this air
Freshen'd by plunging tides, by showers !
Have felt this breath he loved, of fair
Cool northern fields, and grass, and flowers !

He long'd for it—press'd on.—In vain !
At the Straits fail'd that spirit brave.
The south was parent of his pain,
The south is mistress of his grave.

A SOUTHERN NIGHT

THE sandy spits, the shore-lock'd lakes,
Melt into open, moonlit sea ;
The soft Mediterranean breaks
At my feet, free.

Dotting the fields of corn and vine,
Like ghosts the huge, gnarl'd olives stand.
Behind, that lovely mountain-line !
While, by the strand,

Cette, with its glistening houses white,
Curves with the curving beach away
To where the lighthouse beacons bright
Far in the bay.

Ah ! such a night, so soft, so lone,
So moonlit, saw me once of yore¹³
Wander unquiet, and my own
Vext heart deplore.

But now that trouble is forgot ;
Thy memory, thy pain, to-night,
My brother ! and thine early lot,¹⁴
Possess me quite.

ELEGIAC POEMS

The murmur of this Midland deep
Is heard to-night around thy grave,
There, where Gibraltar's cannon'd steep
O'erfrowns the wave.

For there, with bodily anguish keen,
With Indian heats at last fordone,
With public toil and private teen—
Thou sank'st, alone.

Slow to a stop, at morning grey,
I see the smoke-crown'd vessel come ;
Slow round her paddles dies away
The seething foam.

A boat is lower'd from her side ;
Ah, gently place him on the bench !
That spirit—if all have not yet died—
A breath might quench.

Is this the eye, the footstep fast,
The mien of youth we used to see,
Poor, gallant boy !—for such thou wast,
Still art, to me.

The limbs their wonted tasks refuse ;
The eyes are glazed, thou canst not speak ;
And whiter than thy white burnous
That wasted cheek !

A SOUTHERN NIGHT

Enough ! The boat, with quiet shock,
Unto its haven coming nigh,
Touches, and on Gibraltar's rock
Lands thee to die.

Ah me ! Gibraltar's strand is far,
But farther yet across the brine
Thy dear wife's ashes buried are,
Remote from thine.

For there, where morning's sacred fount
Its golden rain on earth confers,
The snowy Himalayan Mount
O'ershadows hers.

Strange irony of fate, alas,
Which, for two jaded English, saves,
When from their dusty life they pass,
Such peaceful graves !

In cities should we English lie,
Where cries are rising ever new,
And men's incessant stream goes by—
We who pursue

Our business with unslackening stride,
Traverse in troops, with care-fill'd breast,
The soft Mediterranean side,
The Nile, the East,

ELEGIAC POEMS

And see all sights from pole to pole,
And glance, and nod, and bustle by ;
And never once possess our soul
Before we die.

Not by those hoary Indian hills,
Not by this gracious Midland sea
Whose floor to-night sweet moonshine fills,
Should our graves be.

Some sage, to whom the world was dead,
And men were specks, and life a play ;
Who made the roots of trees his bed,
And once a day

With staff and gourd his way did bend
To villages and homes of man,
For food to keep him till he end
His mortal span

And the pure goal of being reach ;
Hoar-headed, wrinkled, clad in white,
Without companion, without speech,
By day and night

Pondering God's mysteries untold,
And tranquil as the glacier-snows—
He by those Indian mountains old
Might well repose.

A SOUTHERN NIGHT

Some grey crusading knight austere,
Who bore Saint Louis company,
And came home hurt to death, and here
Landed to die ;

Some youthful troubadour, whose tongue
Fill'd Europe once with his love-pain,
Who here outworn had sunk, and sung
His dying strain ;

Some girl, who here from castle-bower,
With furtive step and cheek of flame,
'Twixt myrtle-hedges all in flower
By moonlight came

To meet her pirate-lover's ship ;
And from the wave-kiss'd marble stair
Beckon'd him on, with quivering lip
And floating hair ;

And lived some moons in happy trance,
Then learnt his death and pined away—
Such by these waters of romance
'Twas meet to lay.

But you—a grave for knight or sage,
Romantic, solitary, still,
O spent ones of a work-day age !
Befits you ill.

ELEGIAC POEMS

So sang I ; but the midnight breeze,
Down to the brimm'd, moon-charmed main,
Comes softly through the olive-trees,
And checks my strain.

I think of her, whose gentle tongue
All plaint in her own cause controll'd ;
Of thee I think, my brother ! young
In heart, high-soul'd—

That comely face, that cluster'd brow,
That cordial hand, that bearing free,
I see them still, I see them now,
Shall always see !

And what but gentleness untired,
And what but noble feeling warm,
Wherever shown, howe'er inspired,
Is grace, is charm ?

What else is all these waters are,
What else is steep'd in lucid sheen,
What else is bright, what else is fair,
What else serene ?

Mild o'er her grave, ye mountains, shine !
Gently by his, ye waters, glide !
To that in you which is divine
They were allied.

HAWORTH CHURCHYARD

APRIL, 1855

WHERE, under Loughrigg, the stream
Of Rotha sparkles through fields
Vested for ever with green,
Four years since, in the house
Of a gentle spirit, now dead—
Wordsworth's son-in-law, friend—
I saw the meeting of two
Gifted women.¹⁵ The one,
Brilliant with recent renown,
Young, unpractised, had told
With a master's accent her feign'd
Story of passionate life ;
The other, maturer in fame,
Earning, she too, her praise
First in fiction, had since
Widen'd her sweep, and survey'd
History, politics, mind.

The two held converse ; they wrote
In a book which of world-famous souls

ELEGIAC POEMS

Kept the memorial ;—bard,
Warrior, statesman, had sign'd
Their names ; chief glory of all,
Scott had bestow'd there his last
Breathings of song, with a pen
Tottering, a death-stricken hand.

Hope at that meeting smiled fair.
Years in number, it seem'd,
Lay before both, and a fame
Heighten'd, and multiplied power.—
Behold ! The elder, to-day,
Lies expecting from death,
In mortal weakness, a last
Summons ! the younger is dead !

First to the living we pay
Mournful homage ;—the Muse
Gains not an earth-deafen'd ear.

Hail to the steadfast soul,
Which, unflinching and keen,
Wrought to erase from its depth
Mist and illusion and fear !
Hail to the spirit which dared
Trust its own thoughts, before yet
Echoed her back by the crowd !
Hail to the courage which gave
Voice to its creed, ere the creed
Won consecration from time !

HAWORTH CHURCHYARD

Turn we next to the dead.
—How shall we honour the young,
The ardent, the gifted ? how mourn ?
Console we cannot, her ear
Is deaf. Far northward from here,
In a churchyard high 'mid the moors
Of Yorkshire, a little earth
Stops it for ever to praise.

Where, behind Keighley, the road
Up to the heart of the moors
Between heath-clad showery hills
Runs, and colliers' carts
Poach the deep ways coming down,
And a rough, grimed race have their homes—
There on its slope is built
The moorland town. But the church
Stands on the crest of the hill,
Lonely and bleak ;—at its side
The parsonage-house and the graves.

Strew with laurel the grave
Of the early-dying ! Alas,
Early she goes on the path
To the silent country, and leaves
Half her laurels unwon,
Dying too soon !—yet green
Laurels she had, and a course
Short, but redoubled by fame.

ELEGIAC POEMS

And not friendless, and not
Only with strangers to meet,
Faces ungreeting and cold,
Thou, O mourn'd one, to-day
Enterest the house of the grave !
Those of thy blood, whom thou lov'dst,
Have preceded thee—young,
Loving, a sisterly band ;
Some in art, some in gift
Inferior—all in fame.
They, like friends, shall receive
This comer, greet her with joy ;
Welcome the sister, the friend ;
Hear with delight of thy fame !

Round thee they lie—the grass
Blows from their graves to thy own !
She, whose genius, though not
Puissant like thine, was yet
Sweet and graceful ;—and she
(How shall I sing her ?) whose soul
Knew no fellow for might,
Passion, vehemence, grief,
Daring, since Byron died,
That world-famed son of fire—she, who sank
Baffled, unknown, self-consumed ;
Whose too bold dying song ¹⁶
Stirr'd, like a clarion-blast, my soul.

Of one, too, I have heard,
A brother—sleeps he here ?

HAWORTH CHURCHYARD

Of all that gifted race
Not the least gifted ; young,
Unhappy, eloquent—the child
Of many hopes, of many tears.
O boy, if here thou sleep'st, sleep well !
On thee too did the Muse
Bright in thy cradle smile ;
But some dark shadow came
(I know not what) and interposed.

Sleep, O cluster of friends,
Sleep !—or only when May,
Brought by the west-wind, returns
Back to your native heaths,
And the plover is heard on the moors,
Yearly awake to behold
The opening summer, the sky,
The shining moorland—to hear
The drowsy bee, as of old,
Hum o'er the thyme, the grouse
Call from the heather in bloom !
Sleep, or only for this
Break your united repose !

EPILOGUE

So I sang ; but the Muse,
Shaking her head, took the harp—
Stern interrupted my strain,
Angrily smote on the chords.

April showers
Rush o'er the Yorkshire moors.
Stormy, through driving mist,
Loom the blurr'd hills ; the rain
Lashes the newly-made grave.

Unquiet souls !
—In the dark fermentation of earth,
In the never idle workshop of nature,
In the eternal movement,
Ye shall find yourselves again !

RUGBY CHAPEL

NOVEMBER, 1857

COLDLY, sadly descends
The autumn-evening. The field
Strewn with its dank yellow drifts
Of wither'd leaves, and the elms,
Fade into dimness apace,
Silent ;—hardly a shout
From a few boys late at their play !
The lights come out in the street,
In the school-room windows ;—but cold,
Solemn, unlighted, austere,
Through the gathering darkness, arise
The chapel-walls, in whose bound
Thou, my father ! art laid.

There thou dost lie, in the gloom
Of the autumn evening. But ah !
That word, *gloom*, to my mind
Brings thee back, in the light
Of thy radiant vigour, again ;
In the gloom of November we pass'd

ELEGIAC POEMS

Days not dark at thy side ;
Seasons impair'd not the ray
Of thy buoyant cheerfulness clear.
Such thou wast ! and I stand
In the autumn evening, and think
Of bygone autumns with thee.

Fifteen years have gone round
Since thou arosest to tread,
In the summer-morning, the road
Of death, at a call unforeseen,
Sudden. For fifteen years,
We who till then in thy shade
Rested as under the boughs
Of a mighty oak, have endured
Sunshine and rain as we might,
Bare, unshaded, alone,
Lacking the shelter of thee.

O strong soul, by what shore
Tarriest thou now ? For that force,
Surely, has not been left vain !
Somewhere, surely, afar,
In the sounding labour-house vast
Of being, is practised that strength,
Zealous, beneficent, firm !

Yes, in some far-shining sphere,
Conscious or not of the past,
Still thou performest the word
Of the Spirit in whom thou dost live—

RUGBY CHAPEL

Prompt, unwearied, as here !
Still thou upraisest with zeal
The humble good from the ground,
Sternly represses the bad !
Still, like a trumpet, dost rouse
Those who with half-open eyes
Tread the border-land dim
'Twixt vice and virtue ; reviv'st,
Succourest !—this was thy work,
This was thy life upon earth.

What is the course of the life
Of mortal men on the earth ?—
Most men eddy about
Here and there—eat and drink,
Chatter and love and hate,
Gather and squander, are raised
Aloft, are hurl'd in the dust,
Striving blindly, achieving
Nothing ; and then they die—
Perish ;—and no one asks
Who or what they have been,
More than he asks what waves,
In the moonlit solitudes mild
Of the midmost Ocean, have swell'd,
Foam'd for a moment, and gone.

And there are some, whom a thirst
Ardent, unquenchable, fires,
Not with the crowd to be spent,
Not without aim to go round

ELEGIAC POEMS

In an eddy of purposeless dust,
Effort unmeaning and vain.
Ah yes ! some of us strive
Not without action to die
Fruitless, but something to snatch
From dull oblivion, nor all
Glut the devouring grave !
We, we have chosen our path—
Path to a clear-purposed goal,
Path of advance !—but it leads
A long, steep journey, through sunk
Gorges, o'er mountains in snow.
Cheerful, with friends, we set forth—
Then, on the height, comes the storm.
Thunder crashes from rock
To rock, the cataracts reply,
Lightnings dazzle our eyes.
Roaring torrents have breach'd
The track, the stream-bed descends
In the place where the wayfarer once
Planted his footstep—the spray
Boils o'er its borders ! aloft
The unseen snow-beds dislodge
Their hanging ruin ; alas,
Havoc is made in our train !
Friends, who set forth at our side,
Falter, are lost in the storm.
We, we only are left !
With frowning foreheads, with lips
Sternly compress'd, we strain on,
On—and at nightfall at last

RUGBY CHAPEL

Come to the end of our way,
To the lonely inn 'mid the rocks ;
Where the gaunt and taciturn host
Stands on the threshold, the wind
Shaking his thin white hairs—
Holds his lantern to scan
Our storm-beat figures, and asks :
Whom in our party we bring ?
Whom we have left in the snow ?

Sadly we answer : We bring
Only ourselves ! we lost
Sight of the rest in the storm.
Hardly ourselves we fought through,
Stripp'd, without friends, as we are.
Friends, companions, and train,
The avalanche swept from our side.

But thou would'st not *alone*
Be saved, my father ! *alone*
Conquer and come to thy goal,
Leaving the rest in the wild.
We were weary, and we
Fearful, and we in our march
Fain to drop down and to die.
Still thou turnedst, and still
Beckonedst the trembler, and still
Gavest the weary thy hand.

If, in the paths of the world,
Stones might have wounded thy feet,

ELEGIAC POEMS

Toil or dejection have tried
Thy spirit, of that we saw
Nothing—to us thou wast still
Cheerful, and helpful, and firm !
Therefore to thee it was given
Many to save with thyself ;
And, at the end of thy day,
O faithful shepherd ! to come,
Bringing thy sheep in thy hand.

And through thee I believe
In the noble and great who are gone ;
Pure souls honour'd and blest
By former ages, who else—
Such, so soulless, so poor,
Is the race of men whom I see—
Seem'd but a dream of the heart,
Seem'd but a cry of desire.
Yes ! I believe that there lived
Others like thee in the past,
Not like the men of the crowd
Who all round me to-day
Bluster or cringe, and make life
Hideous, and arid, and vile ;
But souls temper'd with fire,
Fervent, heroic, and good,
Helpers and friends of mankind.

Servants of God !—or sons
Shall I not call you ? because
Not as servants ye knew

RUGBY CHAPEL

Your Father's innermost mind,
His, who unwillingly sees
One of his little ones lost—
Yours is the praise, if mankind
Hath not as yet in its march
Fainted, and fallen, and died !

See ! In the rocks of the world
Marches the host of mankind,
A feeble, wavering line.
Where are they tending ?—A God
Marshall'd them, gave them their goal.
Ah, but the way is so long !
Years they have been in the wild !
Sore thirst plagues them, the rocks,
Rising all round, overawe ;
Factions divide them, their host
Threatens to break, to dissolve.
—Ah, keep, keep them combined !
Else, of the myriads who fill
That army, not one shall arrive ;
Sole they shall stray ; in the rocks
Stagger for ever in vain,
Die one by one in the waste.

Then, in such hour of need
Of your fainting, dispirited race,
Ye, like angels, appear,
Radiant with ardour divine !
Beacons of hope, ye appear !
Languor is not in your heart,

ELEGIAC POEMS

Weakness is not in your word,
Weariness not on your brow.
Ye alight in our van! at your voice,
Panic, despair, flee away.
Ye move through the ranks, recall
The stragglers, refresh the outworn,
Praise, re-inspire the brave!
Order, courage, return.
Eyes rekindling, and prayers,
Follow your steps as ye go.
Ye fill up the gaps in our files,
Strengthen the wavering line,
Stablish, continue our march,
On, to the bound of the waste,
On, to the City of God.

HEINE'S GRAVE

'*HENRI HEINE*'—'tis here !
That black tombstone, the name
Carved there—no more ! and the smooth,
Swarded alleys, the limes
Touch'd with yellow by hot
Summer, but under them still,
In September's bright afternoon,
Shadow, and verdure, and cool.
Trim Montmartre ! the faint
Murmur of Paris outside ;
Crisp everlasting-flowers,
Yellow and black, on the graves.

Half blind, palsied, in pain,
Hither to come, from the streets'
Uproar, surely not loath
Wast thou, Heine !—to lie
Quiet, to ask for closed
Shutters, and darken'd room,
And cool drinks, and an eased
Posture, and opium, no more ;
Hither to come, and to sleep
Under the wings of Renown.

ELEGIAC POEMS

Ah ! not little, when pain
Is most quelling, and man
Easily quell'd, and the fine
Temper of genius so soon
Thrills at each smart, is the praise,
Not to have yielded to pain !
No small boast, for a weak
Son of mankind, to the earth
Pinn'd by the thunder, to rear
His bolt-scathed front to the stars ;
And, undaunted, retort
'Gainst thick-crashing, insane,
Tyrannous tempests of bale,
Arrowy lightnings of soul.

Hark ! through the alley resounds
Mocking laughter ! A film
Creeps o'er the sunshine ; a breeze
Ruffles the warm afternoon,
Saddens my soul with its chill.
Gibing of spirits in scorn
Shakes every leaf of the grove,
Mars the benignant repose
Of this amiable home of the dead.

Bitter spirits, ye claim
Heine ?—Alas, he is yours !
Only a moment I long'd
Here in the quiet to snatch
From such mates the outworn
Poet, and steep him in calm.

HEINE'S GRAVE

Only a moment ! I knew
Whose he was who is here
Buried—I knew he was yours !
Ah, I knew that I saw
Here no sepulchre built
In the laurell'd rock, o'er the blue
Naples bay, for a sweet
Tender Virgil ! no tomb
On Ravenna sands, in the shade
Of Ravenna pines, for a high
Austere Dante ! no grave
By the Avon side, in the bright
Stratford meadows, for thee,
Shakespeare ! loveliest of souls,
Peerless in radiance, in joy.

What, then, so harsh and malign,
Heine ! distils from thy life ?
Poisons the peace of thy grave ?

I chide with thee not, that thy sharp
Upbraidings often assail'd
England, my country—for we,
Heavy and sad, for her sons,
Long since, deep in our hearts,
Echo the blame of her foes.
We, too, sigh that she flags ;
We, too, say that she now—
Scarce comprehending the voice
Of her greatest, golden-mouth'd sons
Of a former age any more—

ELEGIAC POEMS

Stupidly travels her round
Of mechanic business, and lets
Slow die out of her life
Glory, and genius, and joy.

So thou arraign'st her, her foe ;
So we arraign her, her sons.

Yes, we arraign her ! but she,
The weary Titan, with deaf
Ears, and labour-dimm'd eyes,
Regarding neither to right
Nor left, goes passively by,
Staggering on to her goal ;
Bearing on shoulders immense,
Atlanteän, the load,
Wellnigh not to be borne,
Of the too vast orb of her fate.

But was it thou—I think
Surely it was !—that bard
Unnamed, who, Goethe said,
Had every other gift, but wanted love ;
Love, without which the tongue
Even of angels sounds amiss ?

Charm is the glory which makes
Song of the poet divine,
Love is the fountain of charm.
How without charm wilt thou draw,
Poet ! the world to thy way ?

HEINE'S GRAVE

Not by the lightnings of wit—
Not by the thunder of scorn !
These to the world, too, are given ;
Wit it possesses, and scorn—
Charm is the poet's alone.

*Hollow and dull are the great,
And artists envious, and the mob profane.*

We know all this, we know !
Cam'st thou from heaven, O child
Of light ! but this to declare ?
Alas, to help us forget
Such barren knowledge awhile,
God gave the poet his song !

Therefore a secret unrest
Tortured thee, brilliant and bold !
Therefore triumph itself
Tasted amiss to thy soul.
Therefore, with blood of thy foes,
Trickled in silence thine own.
Therefore the victor's heart
Broke on the field of his fame.

Ah ! as of old, from the pomp
Of Italian Milan, the fair
Flower of marble of white
Southern palaces—steps
Border'd by statues, and walks
Terraced, and orange-bowers
Heavy with fragrance—the blond
German Kaiser full oft

ELEGIAC POEMS

Long'd himself back to the fields,
Rivers, and high-roof'd towns
Of his native Germany ; so,
So, how often ! from hot
Paris drawing-rooms, and lamps
Blazing, and brilliant crowds,
Starr'd and jewell'd, of men
Famous, of women the queens
Of dazzling converse—from fumes
Of praise, hot, heady fumes, to the poor brain
That mount, that madden—how oft
Heine's spirit outworn
Long'd itself out of the din,
Back to the tranquil, the cool
Far German home of his youth !

See ! in the May-afternoon,
O'er the fresh, short turf of the Hartz,
A youth, with the foot of youth,
Heine ! thou climbest again !
Up, through the tall dark firs
Warming their heads in the sun,
Chequering the grass with their shade—
Up, by the stream, with its huge
Moss-hung boulders, and thin
Musical water half-hid—
Up, o'er the rock-strewn slope,
With the sinking sun, and the air
Chill, and the shadows now
Long on the grey hill-side—
To the stone-roof'd hut at the top !

HEINE'S GRAVE

Or, yet later, in watch
On the roof of the Brocken-tower
Thou standest, gazing!—to see
The broad red sun, over field,
Forest, and city, and spire,
And mist-track'd stream of the wide,
Wide German land, going down
In a bank of vapours——again
Standest, at nightfall, alone!

Or, next morning, with limbs
Rested by slumber, and heart
Freshen'd and light with the May,
O'er the gracious spurs coming down
Of the Lower Hartz, among oaks,
And beechen coverts, and copse
Of hazels green in whose depth
Ilse, the fairy transform'd,
In a thousand water-breaks light
Pours her petulant youth—
Climbing the rock which juts
O'er the valley, the dizzily perch'd
Rock—to its iron cross
Once more thou cling'st ; to the Cross
Clingest ! with smiles, with a sigh !

Goethe, too, had been there.¹⁷
In the long-past winter he came
To the frozen Hartz, with his soul
Passionate, eager—his youth
All in ferment!—but he

ELEGIAC POEMS

Destined to work and to live
Left it, and thou, alas !
Only to laugh and to die.

But something prompts me : Not thus
Take leave of Heine ! not thus
Speak the last word at his grave !
Not in pity, and not
With half censure—with awe
Hail, as it passes from earth
Scattering lightnings, that soul !

The Spirit of the world,
Beholding the absurdity of men—
Their vaunts, their feats—let a sardonic smile,
For one short moment, wander o'er his lips.
That smile was Heine!—for its earthly hour
The strange guest sparkled ; now 'tis pass'd away.

That was Heine ! and we,
Myriads who live, who have lived,
What are we all, but a mood,
A single mood, of the life
Of the Spirit in whom we exist,
Who alone is all things in one ?

Spirit, who fillest us all !
Spirit, who utterest in each
New-coming son of mankind
Such of thy thoughts as thou wilt !
O thou, one of whose moods,

HEINE'S GRAVE

Bitter and strange, was the life
Of Heine—his strange, alas,
His bitter life !—may a life
Other and milder be mine !
May'st thou a mood more serene,
Happier, have utter'd in mine !
May'st thou the rapture of peace
Deep have embreathed at its core ;
Made it a ray of thy thought,
Made it a beat of thy joy !

STANZAS FROM THE GRANDE
CHARTREUSE

THROUGH Alpine meadows soft-suffused
With rain, where thick the crocus blows,
Past the dark forges long disused,
The mule-track from Saint Laurent goes.
The bridge is cross'd, and slow we ride,
Through forest, up the mountain-side.

The autumnal evening darkens round,
The wind is up, and drives the rain ;
While, hark ! far down, with strangled sound
Doth the Dead Guier's stream complain,
Where that wet smoke, among the woods,
Over his boiling cauldron broods.

Swift rush the spectral vapours white
Past limestone scars with ragged pines,
Showing—then blotting from our sight !—
Halt—through the cloud-drift something shines !
High in the valley, wet and drear,
The huts of Courrierie appear.

Strike leftward ! cries our guide ; and higher
Mounts up the stony forest-way.
At last the encircling trees retire ;

THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE

Look ! through the showery twilight grey
What pointed roofs are these advance ?—
A palace of the Kings of France ?

Approach, for what we seek is here !
Alight, and sparely sup, and wait
For rest in this outbuilding near ;
Then cross the sward and reach that gate.
Knock ; pass the wicket ! Thou art come
To the Carthusians' world-famed home.

The silent courts, where night and day
Into their stone-carved basins cold
The splashing icy fountains play—
The humid corridors behold !
Where, ghostlike in the deepening night,
Cowl'd forms brush by in gleaming white.

The chapel, where no organ's peal
Invests the stern and naked prayer—
With penitential cries they kneel
And wrestle ; rising then, with bare
And white uplifted faces stand,
Passing the Host from hand to hand ;

Each takes, and then his visage wan
Is buried in his cowl once more.
The cells !—the suffering Son of Man
Upon the wall—the knee-worn floor—
And where they sleep, that wooden bed,
Which shall their coffin be, when dead !

ELEGIAC POEMS

The library, where tract and tome
Not to feed priestly pride are there,
To hymn the conquering march of Rome,
Nor yet to amuse, as ours are !
They paint of souls the inner strife,
Their drops of blood, their death in life.

The garden, overgrown—yet mild,
See, fragrant herbs are flowering there !
Strong children of the Alpine wild
Whose culture is the brethren's care ;
Of human tasks their only one,
And cheerful works beneath the sun.

Those halls, too, destined to contain
Each its own pilgrim-host of old,
From England, Germany, or Spain—
All are before me ! I behold
The House, the Brotherhood austere !
—And what am I, that I am here ?

For rigorous teachers seized my youth,
And purged its faith, and trimm'd its fire,
Show'd me the high, white star of Truth,
There bade me gaze, and there aspire.
Even now their whispers pierce the gloom :
What dost thou in this living tomb ?

Forgive me, masters of the mind !
At whose behest I long ago
So much unlearnt, so much resign'd—

THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE

I come not here to be your foe !
I seek these anchorites, not in ruth,
To curse and to deny your truth ;

Not as their friend, or child, I speak !
But as, on some far northern strand,
Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek
In pity and mournful awe might stand
Before some fallen Runic stone—
For both were faiths, and both are gone.

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.
Their faith, my tears, the world deride—
I come to shed them at their side.

Oh, hide me in your gloom profound,
Ye solemn seats of holy pain !
Take me, cowl'd forms, and fence me round,
Till I possess my soul again ;
Till free my thoughts before me roll ;
Not chafed by hourly false control !

For the world cries your faith is now
But a dead time's exploded dream ;
My melancholy, sciolists say,
Is a pass'd mode, an outworn theme—
As if the world had ever had
A faith, or sciolists been sad !

ELEGIAC POEMS

Ah, if it *be* pass'd, take away,
At least, the restlessness, the pain ;
Be man henceforth no more a prey
To these out-dated stings again !
The nobleness of grief is gone—
Ah, leave us not the fret alone !

But—if you cannot give us ease—
Last of the race of them who grieve,
Here leave us to die out with these
Last of the people who believe !
Silent, while years engrave the brow ;
Silent—the best are silent now.

Achilles ponders in his tent,
The kings of modern thought are dumb ;
Silent they are, though not content,
And wait to see the future come.
They have the grief men had of yore,
But they contend and cry no more.

Our fathers water'd with their tears
This sea of time whereon we sail,
Their voices were in all men's ears
Who pass'd within their puissant hail.
Still the same ocean round us raves,
But we stand mute, and watch the waves.

For what avail'd it, all the noise
And outcry of the former men ?—
Say, have their sons achieved more joys,

THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE

Say, is life lighter now than then ?
The sufferers died, they left their pain—
The pangs which tortured them remain.

What helps it now, that Byron bore,
With haughty scorn which mock'd the smart,
Through Europe to the Ætolian shore
The pageant of his bleeding heart ?
That thousands counted every groan,
And Europe made his woe her own ?

What boots it, Shelley ! that the breeze
Carried thy lovely wail away,
Musical through Italian trees
Which fringe thy soft blue Spezzian bay ?
Inheritors of thy distress
Have restless hearts one throb the less ?

Or are we easier, to have read,
O Obermann ! the sad, stern page,
Which tells us how thou hidd'st thy head
From the fierce tempest of thine age
In the lone brakes of Fontainebleau,
Or chalets near the Alpine snow ?

Ye slumber in your silent grave !—
The world, which for an idle day
Grace to your mood of sadness gave,
Long since hath flung her weeds away.
The eternal trifler breaks your spell ;
But we—we learnt your lore too well !

ELEGIAC POEMS

Years hence, perhaps, may dawn an age,
More fortunate, alas ! than we,
Which without hardness will be sage,
And gay without frivolity.
Sons of the world, oh, speed those years ;
But, while we wait, allow our tears !

Allow them ! We admire with awe
The exulting thunder of your race ;
You give the universe your law,
You triumph over time and space !
Your pride of life, your tireless powers,
We laud them, but they are not ours.

We are like children rear'd in shade
Beneath some old-world abbey wall,
Forgotten in a forest-glade,
And secret from the eyes of all.
Deep, deep the greenwood round them waves,
Their abbey, and its close of graves !

But, where the road runs near the stream,
Oft through the trees they catch a glance
Of passing troops in the sun's beam—
Pennon, and plume, and flashing lance !
Forth to the world those soldiers fare,
To life, to cities, and to war !

And through the wood, another way,
Faint bugle-notes from far are borne,
Where hunters gather, staghounds bay,

THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE

Round some fair forest-lodge at morn.
Gay dames are there, in sylvan green ;
Laughter and cries—those notes between !

The banners flashing through the trees
Make their blood dance and chain their eyes ;
That bugle-music on the breeze
Arrests them with a charm'd surprise.
Banner by turns and bugle woo :
Ye shy recluses, follow too !

O children, what do ye reply ?—
' Action and pleasure, will ye roam
Through these secluded dells to cry
And call us ?—but too late ye come !
Too late for us your call ye blow,
Whose bent was taken long ago.

' Long since we pace this shadow'd nave ;
We watch those yellow tapers shine,
Emblems of hope over the grave,
In the high altar's depth divine ;
The organ carries to our ear
Its accents of another sphere.

' Fenced early in this cloistral round
Of reverie, of shade, of prayer,
How should we grow in other ground ?
How can we flower in foreign air ?
—Pass, banners, pass, and bugles, cease ;
And leave our desert to its peace !'

STANZAS IN MEMORY OF THE
AUTHOR OF 'OBERMANN' ¹⁸

NOVEMBER, 1849

IN front the awful Alpine track
Crawls up its rocky stair ;
The autumn storm-winds drive the rack,
Close o'er it, in the air.

Behind are the abandon'd baths ¹⁹
Mute in their meadows lone ;
The leaves are on the valley-paths,
The mists are on the Rhone—

The white mists rolling like a sea !
I hear the torrents roar.
—Yes, Obermann, all speaks of thee ;
I feel thee near once more !

I turn thy leaves ! I feel their breath
Once more upon me roll ;
That air of languor, cold, and death,
Which brooded o'er thy soul.

THE AUTHOR OF 'OBERMANN'

Fly hence, poor wretch, whoe'er thou art,
Condemn'd to cast about,
All shipwreck in thy own weak heart,
For comfort from without !

A fever in these pages burns
Beneath the calm they feign ;
A wounded human spirit turns,
Here, on its bed of pain.

Yes, though the virgin mountain-air
Fresh through these pages blows ;
Though to these leaves the glaciers spare
The soul of their white snows ;

Though here a mountain-murmur swells
Of many a dark-bough'd pine ;
Though, as you read, you hear the bells
Of the high-pasturing kine—

Yet, through the hum of torrent lone,
And brooding mountain-bee,
There sobs I know not what ground-tone
Of human agony.

Is it for this, because the sound
Is fraught too deep with pain,
That, Obermann ! the world around
So little loves thy strain ?

ELEGIAC POEMS

Some secrets may the poet tell,
For the world loves new ways ;
To tell too deep ones is not well—
It knows not what he says.

Yet, of the spirits who have reign'd
In this our troubled day,
I know but two, who have attain'd,
Save thee, to see their way.

By England's lakes, in grey old age,
His quiet home one keeps ;
And one, the strong much-toiling sage,
In German Weimar sleeps.

But Wordsworth's eyes avert their ken
From half of human fate ;
And Goethe's course few sons of men
May think to emulate.

For he pursued a lonely road,
His eyes on Nature's plan ;
Neither made man too much a God,
Nor God too much a man.

Strong was he, with a spirit free
From mists, and sane, and clear ;
Clearer, how much ! than ours—yet we
Have a worse course to steer.

THE AUTHOR OF 'OBERMANN'

For though his manhood bore the blast
Of a tremendous time,
Yet in a tranquil world was pass'd
His tenderer youthful prime.

But we, brought forth and rear'd in hours
Of change, alarm, surprise—
What shelter to grow ripe is ours?
What leisure to grow wise?

Like children bathing on the shore,
Buried a wave beneath,
The second wave succeeds, before
We have had time to breathe.

Too fast we live, too much are tried,
Too harass'd, to attain
Wordsworth's sweet calm, or Goethe's wide
And luminous view to gain.

And then we turn, thou sadder sage,
To thee! we feel thy spell!
—The hopeless tangle of our age,
Thou too hast scann'd it well!

Immoveable thou sittest, still
As death, composed to bear!
Thy head is clear, thy feeling chill,
And icy thy despair.

ELEGIAC POEMS

Yes, as the son of Thetis said,
I hear thee saying now :
Greater by far than thou art dead ;
Strive not ! - die also thou !

Ah ! two desires toss about
The poet's feverish blood.
One drives him to the world without,
And one to solitude.

The glow, he cries, the thrill of life,
Where, where do these abound ?—
Not in the world, not in the strife
Of men, shall they be found.

He who hath watch'd, not shared, the strife,
Knows how the day hath gone.
He only lives with the world's life,
Who hath renounced his own.

To thee we come, then ! Clouds are roll'd
Where thou, O seer ! art set ;
Thy realm of thought is drear and cold—
The world is colder yet !

And thou hast pleasures, too, to share
With those who come to thee—
Balms floating on thy mountain-air,
And healing sights to see.

THE AUTHOR OF 'OBERMANN'

How often, where the slopes are green
On Jaman, hast thou sate
By some high chalet-door, and seen
The summer-day grow late ;

And darkness steal o'er the wet grass
With the pale crocus starr'd,
And reach that glimmering sheet of glass
Beneath the piny sward,

Lake Lemman's waters, far below !
And watch'd the rosy light
Fade from the distant peaks of snow ;
And on the air of night

Heard accents of the eternal tongue
Through the pine branches play—
Listen'd, and felt thyself grow young !
Listen'd and wept——Away !

Away the dreams that but deceive !
And thou, sad guide, adieu !
I go, fate drives me ; but I leave
Half of my life with you.

We, in some unknown Power's employ,
Move on a rigorous line ;
Can neither, when we will, enjoy,
Nor, when we will, resign.

ELEGIAC POEMS

I in the world must live ; but thou,
Thou melancholy shade !
Wilt not, if thou canst see me now,
Condemn me, nor upbraid.

For thou art gone away from earth,
And place with those dost claim,
The Children of the Second Birth,
Whom the world could not tame ;

And with that small, transfigured band,
Whom many a different way
Conducted to their common land,
Thou learn'st to think as they.

Christian and pagan, king and slave,
Soldier and anchorite,
Distinctions we esteem so grave,
Are nothing in their sight.

They do not ask, who pined unseen,
Who was on action hurl'd,
Whose one bond is, that all have been
Unspotted by the world.

There without anger thou wilt see
Him who obeys thy spell
No more, so he but rest, like thee,
Unsoil'd !—and so, farewell.

THE AUTHOR OF 'OBERMANN'

Farewell !—Whether thou now liest near
That much-loved inland sea,
The ripples of whose blue waves cheer
Vevey and Meillerie ;

And in that gracious region bland,
Where with clear-rustling wave
The scented pines of Switzerland
Stand dark round thy green grave,

Between the dusty vineyard-walls
Issuing on that green place
The early peasant still recalls
The pensive stranger's face,

And stoops to clear thy moss-grown date
Ere he plods on again ;—
Or whether, by maligner fate,
Among the swarms of men,

Where between granite terraces
The blue Seine rolls her wave,
The Capital of Pleasure sees
The hardly-heard-of grave ;—

Farewell ! Under the sky we part,
In this stern Alpine dell.
O unstrung will ! O broken heart !
A last, a last farewell !

OBERMANN ONCE MORE

(COMPOSED MANY YEARS AFTER THE PRECEDING)

Savez-vous quelque bien qui console du regret d'un monde !

OBERMANN.

GLION ?——Ah, twenty years, it cuts²⁰
All meaning from a name !
White houses prank where once were huts.
Glion, but not the same !

And yet I know not ! All unchanged
The turf, the pines, the sky !
The hills in their old order ranged ;
The lake, with Chillon by !

And, 'neath those chestnut-trees, where stiff
And stony mounts the way,
The crackling husk-heaps burn, as if
I left them yesterday !

Across the valley, on that slope,
The huts of Avant shine !
Its pines, under their branches, ope
Ways for the pasturing kine.

OBERMANN ONCE MORE

Full-foaming milk-pails, Alpine fare,
Sweet heaps of fresh-cut grass,
Invite to rest the traveller there
Before he climb the pass—

The gentian-flower'd pass, its crown
With yellow spires aflame ;²¹
Whence drops the path to Allière down,
And walls where Byron came,²²

By their green river, who doth change
His birth-name just below ;
Orchard, and croft, and full-stored grange
Nursed by his pastoral flow.

But stop !—to fetch back thoughts that stray
Beyond this gracious bound,
The cone of Jaman, pale and grey,
See, in the blue profound !

Ah, Jaman ! delicately tall
Above his sun-warm'd firs—
What thoughts to me his rocks recall,
What memories he stirs !

And who but thou must be, in truth,
Obermann ! with me here ?
Thou master of my wandering youth,
But left this many a year !

ELEGIAC POEMS

Yes, I forget the world's work wrought,
Its warfare waged with pain ;
An eremite with thee, in thought
Once more I slip my chain,

And to thy mountain-chalet come,
And lie beside its door,
And hear the wild bee's Alpine hum,
And thy sad, tranquil lore !

Again I feel the words inspire
Their mournful calm ; serene,
Yet tinged with infinite desire
For all that *might* have been—

(The harmony from which man swerved
Made his life's rule once more !
The universal order served,
Earth happier than before !

—While thus I mused, night gently ran
Down over hill and wood.
Then, still and sudden, Obermann
On the grass near me stood.

Those pensive features well I knew,
On my mind, years before,
Imaged so oft ! imaged so true !
—A shepherd's garb he wore,

OBERMANN ONCE MORE

A mountain-flower was in his hand,
A book was in his breast.
Bent on my face, with gaze which scann'd
My soul, his eyes did rest.

‘And is it thou,’ he cried, ‘so long
Held by the world which we
Loved not, who turnest from the throng
Back to thy youth and me?’

‘And from thy world, with heart opprest,
Chooseth thou *now* to turn?—
Ah me! we anchorites read things best,
Clearest their course discern!’

‘Thou fledst me when the ungenial earth,
Man’s work-place, lay in gloom.
Return’st thou in her hour of birth,
Of hopes and hearts in bloom?’

‘Perceiv’st thou not the change of day?
Ah! Carry back thy ken,
What, some two thousand years! Survey
The world as it was then!’

‘Like ours it look’d in outward air.
Its head was clear and true,
Sumptuous its clothing, rich its fare,
No pause its action knew;’

ELEGIAC POEMS

‘ Stout was its arm, each thew and bone
Seem’d puissant and alive—
But, ah ! its heart, its heart was stone,
And so it could not thrive !

‘ On that hard Pagan world disgust
And secret loathing fell.
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell.

‘ In his cool hall, with haggard eyes,
The Roman noble lay ;
He drove abroad, in furious guise,
Along the Appian way.

‘ He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,
And crown’d his hair with flowers—
No easier nor no quicker pass’d
The impracticable hours.

‘ The brooding East with awe beheld
Her impious younger world.
The Roman tempest swell’d and swell’d,
And on her head was hurl’d.

‘ The East bow’d low before the blast
In patient, deep disdain ;
She let the legions thunder past,
And plunged in thought again.

OBERMANN ONCE MORE

‘ So well she mused, a morning broke
Across her spirit grey ;
A conquering, new-born joy awoke,
And fill’d her life with day.

‘ “ Poor world,” she cried, “ so deep accurst,
That runn’st from pole to pole
To seek a draught to slake thy thirst—
Go, seek it in thy soul ! ”

‘ She heard it, the victorious West,
In crown and sword array’d !
She felt the void which mined her breast,
She shiver’d and obey’d.

‘ She veil’d her eagles, snapp’d her sword,
And laid her sceptre down ;
Her stately purple she abhorr’d,
And her imperial crown.

‘ She broke her flutes, she stopp’d her sports,
Her artists could not please ;
She tore her books, she shut her courts,
She fled her palaces ;

‘ Lust of the eye and pride of life
She left it all behind,
And hurried, torn with inward strife,
The wilderness to find.

ELEGIAC POEMS

'Tears wash'd the trouble from her face !
She changed into a child !
'Mid weeds and wrecks she stood—a place
Of ruin—but she smiled !

'Oh, had I lived in that great day,
How had its glory new
Fill'd earth and heaven, and caught away
My ravish'd spirit too !

'No thoughts that to the world belong
Had stood against the wave
Of love which set so deep and strong
From Christ's then open grave.

'No cloister-floor of humid stone
Had been too cold for me.
For me no Eastern desert lone
Had been too far to flee.

'No lonely life had pass'd too slow,
When I could hourly scan
Upon his Cross, with head sunk low,
That nail'd, thorn-crowned Man !

'Could see the Mother with her Child
Whose tender winning arts
Have to his little arms beguiled
So many wounded hearts !

OBERMANN ONCE MORE

‘ And centuries came and ran their course,
And unspent all that time
Still, still went forth that Child’s dear force,
And still was at its prime.

‘ Ay, ages long endured his span
Of life—’tis true received—
That gracious Child, that thorn-crown’d Man !
—He lived while we believed.

‘ While we believed, on earth he went,
And open stood his grave.
Men call’d from chamber, church, and tent ;
And Christ was by to save.

‘ Now he is dead ! Far hence he lies
In the lorn Syrian town ;
And on his grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down.

‘ In vain men still, with hoping new,
Regard his death-place dumb,
And say the stone is not yet to,
And wait for words to come.

‘ Ah, o’er that silent sacred land,
Of sun, and arid stone,
And crumbling wall, and sultry sand,
Sounds now one word alone !

ELEGIAC POEMS

‘ *Unduped of fancy, henceforth man
Must labour !—must resign
His all too human creeds, and scan
Simply the way divine !*

‘ But slow that tide of common thought,
Which bathed our life, retired ;
Slow, slow the old world wore to nought
And pulse by pulse expired.

‘ Its frame yet stood without a breach ✓
When blood and warmth were fled ;
And still it spake its wonted speech—
But every word was dead.

‘ And oh, we cried, that on this corse
Might fall a freshening storm !
Rive its dry bones, and with new force
A new-sprung world inform !

‘ —Down came the storm ! O’er France it
pass’d
In sheets of scathing fire ;
All Europe felt that fiery blast,
And shook as it rush’d by her.

‘ Down came the storm ! In ruins fell
The worn-out world we knew.
It pass’d, that elemental swell !
Again appear’d the blue ;

OBERMANN ONCE MORE

‘ The sun shone in the new-wash’d sky,
And what from heaven saw he ?
Blocks of the past, like icebergs high,
Float on a rolling sea !

‘ Upon them plies the race of man
All it before endeavour’d ;
“ Ye live,” I cried, “ ye work and plan,
And know not ye are sever’d !

“ “ Poor fragments of a broken world
Whereon men pitch their tent !
Why were ye too to death not hurl’d
When your world’s day was spent ?

“ “ That glow of central fire is done
Which with its fusing flame
Knit all your parts, and kept you one—
But ye, ye are the same !

“ “ The past, its mask of union on,
Had ceased to live and thrive.
The past, its mask of union gone,
Say, is it more alive ?

“ “ Your creeds are dead, your rites are dead,
Your social order too !
Where tarries he, the Power who said :
See, I make all things new ?

ELEGIAC POEMS

“The millions suffer still, and grieve,
And what can helpers heal
With old-world cures men half believe
For woes they wholly feel ?

“And yet men have such need of joy !
But joy whose grounds are true ;
And joy that should all hearts employ
As when the past was new.

“Ah, not the emotion of that past,
Its common hope, were vain !
Some new such hope must dawn at last,
Or man must toss in pain.

“But now the old is out of date,
The new is not yet born,
And who can be *alone* elate,
While the world lies forlorn ?”

“Then to the wilderness I fled.—
There among Alpine snows
And pastoral huts I hid my head,
And sought and found repose.

“It was not yet the appointed hour.
Sad, patient, and resign’d,
I watch’d the crocus fade and flower,
I felt the sun and wind.

OBERMANN ONCE MORE

‘The day I lived in was not mine,
Man gets no second day.
In dreams I saw the future shine—
But ah ! I could not stay !

‘Action I had not, followers, fame ;
I pass’d obscure, alone.
The after-world forgets my name,
Nor do I wish it known.

‘Composed to bear, I lived and died,
And knew my life was vain,
With fate I murmur not, nor chide,
At Sèvres by the Seine

‘(If Paris that brief flight allow)
My humble tomb explore !
It bears : *Eternity, be thou*
My refuge ! and no more.

‘But thou, whom fellowship of mood
Did make from haunts of strife
Come to my mountain-solitude,
And learn my frustrate life ;

‘O thou, who, ere thy flying span
Was past of cheerful youth,
Didst find the solitary man
And love his cheerless truth—

ELEGIAC POEMS

‘ Despair not thou as I despair’d,
Nor be cold gloom thy prison !
Forward the gracious hours have fared,
And see ! the sun is risen !

‘ He breaks the winter of the past ;
A green, new earth appears.
Millions, whose life in ice lay fast,
Have thoughts, and smiles, and tears.

‘ What though there still need effort, strife ?
Though much be still unwon ?
Yet warm it mounts, the hour of life !
Death’s frozen hour is done !

‘ The world’s great order dawns in sheen,
After long darkness rude,
Divinelier imaged, clearer seen,
With happier zeal pursued.

‘ With hope extinct and brow composed
I mark’d the present die ;
Its term of life was nearly closed,
Yet it had more than I.

‘ But thou, though to the world’s new hour
Thou come with aspect marr’d,
Shorn of the joy, the bloom, the power,
Which best befits its bard—

OBERMANN ONCE MORE

‘ Though more than half thy years be past,
And spent thy youthful prime ;
Though, round thy firmer manhood cast,
Hang weeds of our sad time

‘ Whereof thy youth felt all the spell,
And traversed all the shade—
Though late, though dimm’d, though weak, yet
tell
Hope to a world new-made !

‘ Help it to fill that deep desire,
The want which rack’d our brain,
Consumed our heart with thirst like fire,
Immedicable pain ;

‘ Which to the wilderness drove out
Our life, to Alpine snow,
And palsied all our word with doubt,
And all our work with woe—

‘ What still of strength is left, employ
That end to help attain :
*One common wave of thought and joy
Lifting mankind again !*

—The vision ended. I awoke
As out of sleep, and no
Voice moved ;—only the torrent broke
The silence, far below.

ELEGIAC POEMS

Soft darkness on the turf did lie.
Solemn, o'er hut and wood,
In the yet star-sown nightly sky,
The peak of Jaman stood.

Still in my soul the voice I heard
Of Obermann !——away
I turned ; by some vague impulse stirr'd,
Along the rocks of Naye

Past Sonchaud's piny flanks I gaze
And the blanch'd summit bare
Of Malatrait, to where in haze
The Valais opens fair,

And the domed Velan, with his snows,
Behind the upcrowding hills,
Doth all the heavenly opening close
Which the Rhone's murmur fills—

And glorious there, without a sound,
Across the glimmering lake,
High in the Valais-depth profound,
I saw the morning break.

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NOTE 1, Page 4

Saw The Wide Prospect, and the Asian Fen

THE name Europe (Εὐρώπη, *the wide prospect*) probably describes the appearance of the European coast to the Greeks on the coast of Asia Minor opposite. The name Asia, again, comes, it has been thought, from the muddy fens of the rivers of Asia Minor, such as the Cayster or Mæander, which struck the imagination of the Greeks living near them.

NOTE 2, Page 14

Mycerinus

‘After Chephren, Mycerinus, son of Cheops, reigned over Egypt. He abhorred his father’s courses, and judged his subjects more justly than any of their kings had done.—To him there came an oracle from the city of Buto, to the effect that he was to live but six years longer, and to die in the seventh year from that time.’—HERODOTUS.

NOTE 3, Page 54

Stagirius

Stagirius was a young monk to whom St. Chrysostom addressed three books, and of whom those books give an account. They will be found in the first volume of the Benedictine edition of St. Chrysostom’s works.

NOTE 4, Page 68

Horatian Echo

Written in 1847. Printed by permission of Mr. Arthur Galton, to whom the Poem was given in 1886 for publication in *The Hobby Horse*.

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NOTE 5, Page 77

That wayside inn we left to-day

Those who have been long familiar with the English Lake-Country will find no difficulty in recalling, from the description in the text, the roadside inn at Wythburn on the descent from Dunmail Raise towards Keswick ; its sedentary landlord of thirty years ago, and the passage over the Wythburn Fells to Watendlath.

NOTE 6, Page 89

Sohrab and Rustum

The story of Sohrab and Rustum is told in Sir John Malcolm's *History of Persia*, as follows :—

‘The young Sohrab was the fruit of one of Rustum’s early amours. He had left his mother, and sought fame under the banners of Afrasiab, whose armies he commanded, and soon obtained a renown beyond that of all contemporary heroes but his father. He had carried death and dismay into the ranks of the Persians, and had terrified the boldest warriors of that country, before Rustum encountered him, which at last that hero resolved to do, under a feigned name. They met three times. The first time they parted by mutual consent, though Sohrab had the advantage ; the second, the youth obtained a victory, but granted life to his unknown father ; the third was fatal to Sohrab, who, when writhing in the pangs of death, warned his conqueror to shun the vengeance that is inspired by parental woes, and bade him dread the rage of the mighty Rustum, who must soon learn that he had slain his son Sohrab. These words, we are told, were as death to the aged hero ; and when he recovered from a trance, he called in despair for proofs of what Sohrab had said. The afflicted and dying youth tore open his mail, and showed his father a seal which his mother had placed on his arm when she discovered to him the secret of his birth, and bade him seek his father. The sight of his own signet rendered Rustum quite frantic ; he cursed himself, attempting to put an end to his existence, and was only prevented by the efforts of his expiring son. After Sohrab’s death, he burnt his tents and all his goods, and carried the corpse to Seistan, where it was interred ; the army of Turan was, agreeably to the last request of Sohrab, permitted to cross the Oxus unmolested. To reconcile us to the improbability of this tale, we are informed that Rustum could have

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no idea his son was in existence. The mother of Sohrab had written to him her child was a daughter, fearing to lose her darling infant if she revealed the truth; and Rustum, as before stated, fought under a feigned name, an usage not uncommon in the chivalrous combats of those days.'

NOTE 7, Page 133

Balder Dead

'Balder the Good having been tormented with terrible dreams, indicating that his life was in great peril, communicated them to the assembled Æsir, who resolved to conjure all things to avert from him the threatened danger. Then Frigga exacted an oath from fire and water, from iron, and all other metals, as well as from stones, earths, diseases, beasts, birds, poisons, and creeping things, that none of them would do any harm to Balder. When this was done, it became a favourite pastime of the Æsir, at their meetings, to get Balder to stand up and serve them as a mark, some hurling darts at him, some stones, while others hewed at him with their swords and battle-axes, for do what they would, none of them could harm him, and this was regarded by all as a great honour shown to Balder. But when Loki beheld the scene he was sorely vexed that Balder was not hurt. Assuming, therefore, the shape of a woman, he went to Fensalir, the mansion of Frigga. That goddess, when she saw the pretended woman, inquired of her if she knew what the Æsir were doing at their meetings. She replied, that they were throwing darts and stones at Balder without being able to hurt him.

"Ay," said Frigga, "neither metal nor wood can hurt Balder, for I have exacted an oath from all of them."

"What!" exclaimed the woman, "have all things sworn to spare Balder?"

"All things," replied Frigga, "except one little shrub that grows on the eastern side of Valhalla, and is called Mistletoe, and which I thought too young and feeble to crave an oath from."

'As soon as Loki heard this he went away, and, resuming his natural shape, cut off the mistletoe, and repaired to the place where the gods were assembled. There he found Hödur standing apart, without partaking of the sports, on account of his blindness, and going up to him said, "Why dost thou not also throw something at Balder?"

"Because I am blind," answered Hödur, "and see not where Balder is, and have, moreover, nothing to throw with."

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“Come, then,” said Loki, “do like the rest, and show honour to Balder by throwing this twig at him, and I will direct thy arm toward the place where he stands.”

‘Hödur then took the mistletoe, and, under the guidance of Loki, darted it at Balder, who, pierced through and through, fell down lifeless.’—*Edda*.

NOTE 8, Page 179

Tristram and Iseult

‘In the court of his uncle King Marc, the king of Cornwall, who at this time resided at the castle of Tyntagel, Tristram became expert in all knightly exercises.—The king of Ireland, at Tristram’s solicitations, promised to bestow his daughter Iseult in marriage on King Marc. The mother of Iseult gave to her daughter’s confidante a philtre, or love-potion, to be administered on the night of her nuptials. Of this beverage Tristram and Iseult, on their voyage to Cornwall, unfortunately partook. Its influence, during the remainder of their lives, regulated the affections and destiny of the lovers.—

‘After the arrival of Tristram and Iseult in Cornwall, and the nuptials of the latter with King Marc, a great part of the romance is occupied with their contrivances to procure secret interviews.—Tristram, being forced to leave Cornwall, on account of the displeasure of his uncle, repaired to Brittany, where lived Iseult with the White Hands.—He married her—more out of gratitude than love.—Afterwards he proceeded to the dominions of Arthur, which became the theatre of unnumbered exploits.

‘Tristram, subsequent to these events, returned to Brittany, and to his long-neglected wife. There, being wounded and sick, he was soon reduced to the lowest ebb. In this situation, he despatched a confidant to the queen of Cornwall, to try if he could induce her to follow him to Brittany, etc.’—DUNLOP’s *History of Fiction*.

NOTE 9, Page 227

The Scholar-Gipsy

‘There was very lately a lad in the University of Oxford, who was by his poverty forced to leave his studies there; and at last to join himself to a company of vagabond gipsies. Among these extravagant people, by the insinuating subtilty of his carriage, he

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quickly got so much of their love and esteem as that they discovered to him their mystery. After he had been a pretty while exercised in the trade, there chanced to ride by a couple of scholars, who had formerly been of his acquaintance. They quickly spied out their old friend among the gipsies ; and he gave them an account of the necessity which drove him to that kind of life, and told them that the people he went with were not such impostors as they were taken for, but that they had a traditional kind of learning among them, and could do wonders by the power of imagination, their fancy binding that of others : that himself had learned much of their art, and when he had compassed the whole secret, he intended, he said, to leave their company, and give the world an account of what he had learned.'—GLANVIL's *Vanity of Dogmatizing*, 1661.

NOTE 10, Page 239

Thyrsis

Throughout this poem there is reference to the preceding piece, 'The Scholar-Gipsy.'

NOTE 11, Page 247

Young Daphnis with his silver voice doth sing

Daphnis, the ideal Sicilian shepherd of Greek pastoral poetry, was said to have followed into Phrygia his mistress Piplea, who had been carried off by robbers, and to have found her in the power of the king of Phrygia, Lityerses. Lityerses used to make strangers try a contest with him in reaping corn, and to put them to death if he overcame them. Hercules arrived in time to save Daphnis, took upon himself the reaping-contest with Lityerses, overcame him, and slew him. The Lityerses-song connected with this tradition was, like the Linus-song, one of the early plaintive strains of Greek popular poetry, and used to be sung by corn-reapers. Other traditions represented Daphnis as beloved by a nymph who exacted from him an oath to love no one else. He fell in love with a princess, and was struck blind by the jealous nymph. Mercury, who was his father, raised him to Heaven, and made a fountain spring up in the place from which he ascended. At this fountain the Sicilians offered yearly sacrifices.—See SERVIUS, *Comment. in Virgil. Bucol.* v. 20 and viii. 68.

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NOTE 12, Page 255

Ah! where is he, who should have come

The author's brother, William Delafield Arnold, Director of Public Instruction in the Punjab, and author of *Oakfield, or Fellowship in the East*, died at Gibraltar on his way home from India, April the 9th, 1859.

NOTE 13, Page 257

So moonlit, saw me once of yore

See the poem, 'A Summer Night,' vol. ii. p. 102.

NOTE 14, Page 257

My brother! and thine early lot

See Note 12.

NOTE 15, Page 263

*I saw the meeting of two
Gifted women.*

Charlotte Brontë and Harriet Martineau.

NOTE 16, Page 266

Whose too bold dying song

See the last verses by Emily Brontë in *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*.

NOTE 17, Page 283

Goethe, too, had been there

See 'Harzreise im Winter,' in Goethe's *Gedichte*.

NOTE 18, Page 294

The author of *Obermann*, Étienne Pivert de Senancour, has little celebrity in France, his own country; and out of France he is almost unknown. But the profound inwardness, the austere sincerity, of his principal work, *Obermann*, the delicate feeling for

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nature which it exhibits, and the melancholy eloquence of many passages of it, have attracted and charmed some of the most remarkable spirits of this century, such as George Sand and Sainte-Beuve, and will probably always find a certain number of spirits whom they touch and interest.

Senancour was born in 1770. He was educated for the priesthood, and passed some time in the seminary of St. Sulpice ; broke away from the Seminary and from France itself, and passed some years in Switzerland, where he married ; returned to France in middle life, and followed thenceforward the career of a man of letters, but with hardly any fame or success. He died an old man in 1846, desiring that on his grave might be placed these words only : *Éternité, deviens mon asile !*

The influence of Rousseau, and certain affinities with more famous and fortunate authors of his own day,—Chateaubriand and Madame de Staël,—are everywhere visible in Senancour. But though, like these eminent personages, he may be called a sentimental writer, and though *Obermann*, a collection of letters from Switzerland treating almost entirely of nature and of the human soul, may be called a work of sentiment, Senancour has a gravity and severity which distinguish him from all other writers of the sentimental school. The world is with him in his solitude far less than it is with them ; of all writers he is the most perfectly isolated and the least attitudinising. His chief work, too, has a value and power of its own, apart from these merits of its author. The stir of all the main forces, by which modern life is and has been impelled, lives in the letters of *Obermann* ; the dissolving agencies of the eighteenth century, the fiery storm of the French Revolution, the first faint promise and dawn of that new world which our own time is but now more fully bringing to light,—all these are to be felt, almost to be touched, there. To me, indeed, it will always seem that the impressiveness of this production can hardly be rated too high.

Besides *Obermann* there is one other of Senancour's works which, for those spirits who feel his attraction, is very interesting ; its title is, *Libres Méditations d'un Solitaire Inconnu*.

NOTE 19, Page 294

Behind are the abandon'd baths

The Baths of Leuk. This poem was conceived, and partly composed, in the valley going down from the foot of the Gemmi Pass towards the Rhone.

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NOTE 20, Page 302

Glion?—Ah, twenty years, it cuts

Probably all who know the Vevey end of the Lake of Geneva will recollect Glion, the mountain-village above the castle of Chillon. Glion now has hotels, *pensions*, and villas; but twenty years ago it was hardly more than the huts of Avant opposite to it—huts through which goes that beautiful path over the Col de Jaman, followed by so many foot-travellers on their way from Vevey to the Simmenthal and Thun.

NOTE 21, Page 303

*The gentian-flower'd pass, its crown
With yellow spires aflame.*

The blossoms of the *Gentiana lutea*.

NOTE 22, Page 303

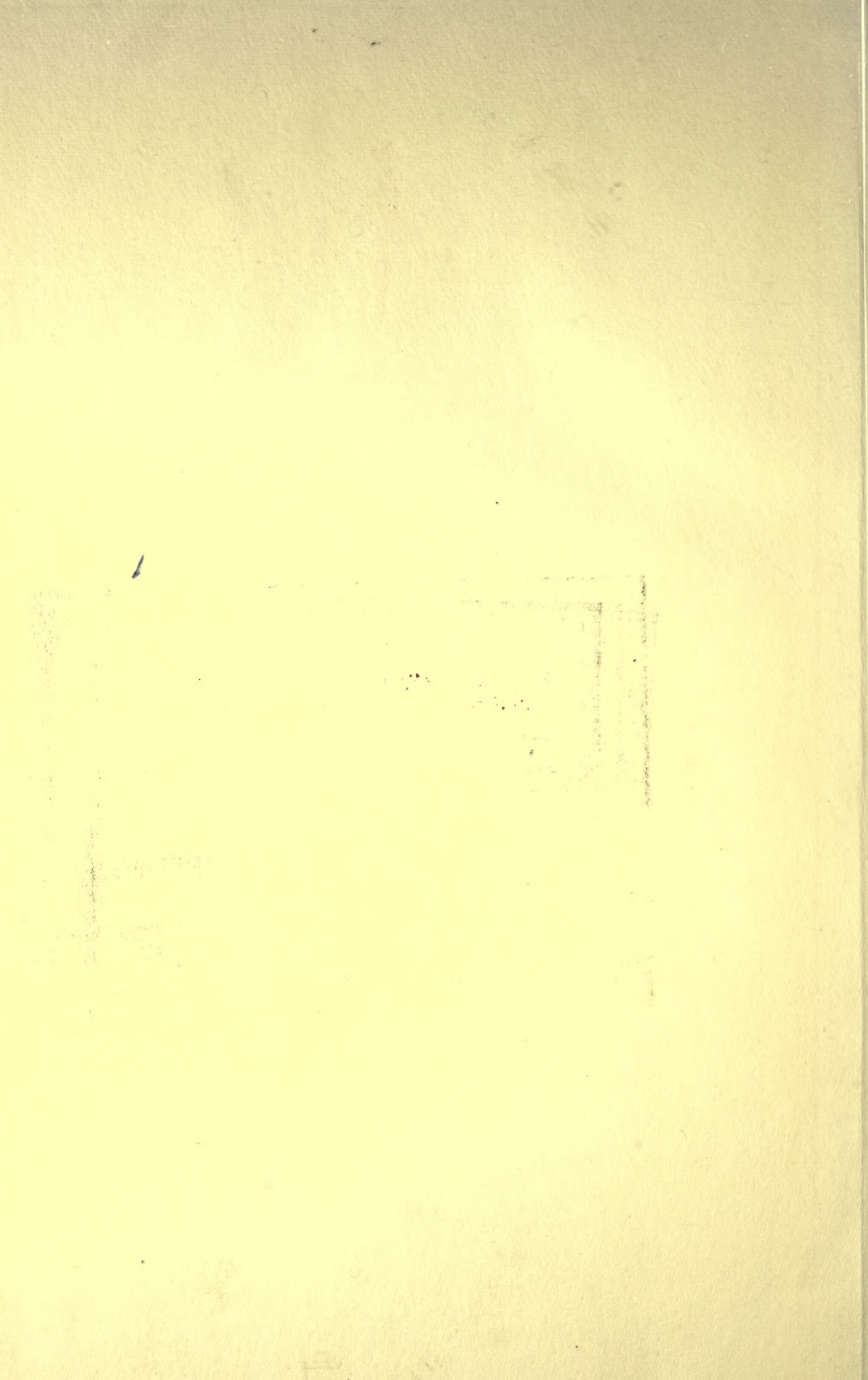
And walls where Byron came

Montbovon. See Byron's Journal, in his *Works*, vol. iii. p. 258. The river Saane becomes the Sarine below Montbovon.

END OF VOL. I

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